

FROM EVE TO EVE: WOMEN'S DREAMING IN THE
MIDDLE AGES AND RENAISSANCE

by

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ABSTRACT

FROM EVE TO EVE: WOMEN'S DREAMING IN THE
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This project examines reports of the dreams of women in fictionalized as well as historical, biographical, and hagiographical accounts from the English Middle Ages and Renaissance. Because an unstable body/spirit dualism forms the basis for both dream theory and anti-feminism during these periods, in texts where women's dreams are reported the instabilities of the two discourses are magnified, resulting in discursive discontinuities that reveal the presence of multiple cultural languages. My argument, based in part on the Bakhtinian concept of heteroglossia, is that these texts are characterized by the generally accepted misogynistic ideas of the period but also demonstrate the possibility of alternate expressions of feminine validation and agency.

In fictionalized accounts of women's dreams from Old and Middle English texts, women's dreams are repeatedly connected with the concept of deception, portraying the woman dreamer in the position of deceived, deceiver, or both. Texts as diverse as *Genesis B*, Middle English poetic and dramatic portrayals of the dream of Pilate's wife, and the works of Chaucer consistently demonstrate this association and often draw on traditions of Eve as the deceived deceiver who bears the guilt for the Fall of mankind. In dramatic accounts from the

early modern period, including among others *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Julius Caesar*, and *The White Devil*, women's dreams are generally aligned with both historical guilt for the Fall as well as ongoing danger to men.

Accounts of women's dreams in historical, biographical, and hagiographical texts (*i.e.* texts not considered fictional), however, demonstrate a pattern in which the intersection of the two dualistic discourses of anti-feminism and dream theory merge to provide an opening for feminine agency and power within existing masculinist power structures. The dreams of Milton's Eve in *Paradise Lost*, while fictionalized, follow yet another pattern because of Milton's theological and philosophical rejection of body/spirit dualism. In *Paradise Lost* Eve is able to share the spiritual transcendence of dreaming without the damaging associations to deception and destruction that plague representations of dreaming women in other texts, and discursive cultural heteroglossia that both maintains masculine hegemony and validates femininity operates openly in the text.

Through close examination of these texts, then, this dissertation offers feminist readings of the reports of women's dreams that examine the operation of medieval and early modern anti-feminist discourse as well as the expressions of alternative discourses regarding women in these cultures.

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CHAPTER 1
DISCOURSE, DREAMS AND WOMEN

1.1 Introduction

This dissertation examines the dreams and visions of women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance as they are reported in both explicitly fictionalized and purportedly biographical, hagiographical, and historical accounts. I began this project with an interest in discovering whether women dreamed differently from men in pre-modern England but soon modified my inquiry to account for the fact that all access to dreaming is discursively mediated through narration or representation.¹ In pre-modern literature, moreover, women's dreaming is only accessible to us through textual mediation complicated by gender hierarchies. Although many scholars have studied dreaming and dreamers of pre-modern England, no one as yet appears to have addressed the effects of gender and discourse on the dreams and visions of women in particular nor to have provided critical readings of accounts of women's dream and visions considering the gender of the dreamer alongside the gendered nature of the text in which the dream or vision is reported. Thus, this dissertation is the first lengthy work exploring the complicated discursive intersection of gender and dreaming in medieval and early modern texts.

My initial inquiry into women's dreaming was generated in part by a question often addressed among feminist scholars: whether women's cultural or literary voices can be heard through the apparently univocal, masculinist message of medieval and early modern English literature. Over thirty years ago Joan Kelly-Gadol's essay "Did Women Have a Renaissance?"

¹ This problem is as real for dream accounts today as it is for those from the past. Even the dreamer herself has no waking access to an actual dream. Only by narrating the dream to ourselves or to others are we able to examine it, and these narrations are often altered or fragmented by forgetfulness, repression, and representational limitations.

challenged accepted concepts of periodicity with regard to women through an examination of women's relative agency in the Italian Middle Ages and Renaissance and began a veritable industry of texts questioning the relative agency of women in the history of western culture.² Unlike Kelly-Gadol's seminal essay, the innumerable critical texts focusing completely or in part on the condition of women in English history and literature have tended to reinforce rather than challenge traditional period divisions, but they do so alongside an ongoing interest in the relative strength of women's voices and agency.³ For example, Claire Lees and Gillian Overing have scrutinized the "cultural record" of Anglo-Saxon England for what it might reveal about women's "agency, absence, and presence" as they "are profoundly interrelated in . . . clerical sources."⁴ Similarly, Jane Chance has sought to identify the "authentic voices of medieval women writers," while Jennifer Richards and Alison Thorne have edited a volume of essays that aim to reflect upon, recover, and recognize women's speech and rhetoric in early modern contexts.⁵ These

² Joan Kelly-Gadol, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?," in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977).

³ English literature and history are generally divided into various versions of three periods: pre-conquest Old English or Anglo-Saxon, post-conquest medieval (including Anglo-Norman and Middle English), and early modern English history and literature.

⁴ Clare A. Lees and Gillian Overing, *Double Agents: Women and Clerical Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 1.

⁵ Jane Chance, *The Literary Subversions of Medieval Women*, New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 10. Jennifer Richards and Allison Thorne, ed., *Rhetoric, Women and Politics in Early Modern England* (New York: Routledge, 2007). A complete list of texts addressing this question directly and indirectly over the last thirty years or so would, without doubt, constitute a book in itself. A tiny set of examples includes Christine Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England and the Impact of 1066* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984); R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books,

texts and many others like them include references to or application of various forms of discourse theory and analysis. They recognize, sometimes silently, that women's speech and writing from these periods are marked by a struggle for dominance among discursive practices and paradigms and especially by conflict with ancient and ubiquitous discourses among men that establish masculine hegemony through delineation and exclusion of the feminine.⁶ Such competition is, however, not limited to the production and transmission of women's speech and

1992); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Mary Carruthers and Derek Pearsall, "The Wife of Bath and the Painting of Lions," in *Chaucer to Spenser: A Critical Reader*, Blackwell Critical Readers in Literature (Oxford, England: Blackwell, 1999); Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989); Suzanne W. Hull, *Chaste, Silent, Obedient: English Books for Women 1475-1640* (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1982); Stacy S. Klein, *Ruling Women: Queenship and Gender in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006); Kathleen Lynch, "Her Name Agnes': The Verifications of Agnes Beaumont's Narrative Ventures," *ELH* 67 (2000); Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1998); Shannon Miller, *Engendering the Fall: John Milton and Seventeenth Century Women Writers* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); S. H. Rigby, "The Wife of Bath, Christine De Pizan, and the Medieval Case for Women," *Chaucer Review: A Journal of Medieval Studies and Literary Criticism* 35, no. 2 (2000); Robert S. Sturges, "The Canterbury Tales' Women Narrators: Three Traditions of Female Authority," *Modern Language Studies* 13, no. 2 (1983); Diane Watt, "Reconstructing the Word: The Political Prophecies of Elizabeth Barton," *Renaissance Quarterly* 50 (1997); Diane Watt, *Secretaries of God* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997).

⁶ As many medievalists do, I shall use the terms "anti-feminist" and "anti-feminism" in reference to the type of masculine discursive praxis in which behaviors and attributes marked as feminine, whether those of actual women or those that might also be engaged in by men, are naturalized as deficient and inferior to behaviors and attributes marked as masculine. I do not intend these terms to refer anachronistically to any sort of political or social movement towards women's rights and/or liberation.

writing but also shapes the portrayal of women in masculine texts.⁷ In this dissertation I explore one specific site at which the effects of discursive conflict, competition, and even cooperation can be discerned: the intersection of the discourse of dream theory with masculine discourse about women. I argue that each of these discourses is fraught with contradictions and ambiguities that, when combined, produce texts in which the often hidden instability of masculinist monovocality reveals itself, regardless of the period in which these texts were produced. Although an anti-feminist connection among women's dreams, deception, and danger pervades masculine portrayals of dreaming women during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the subtle inconsistencies and gaps of these depictions reveal the presence of cultural voices expressing alternate, and more positive, views of the feminine. Detecting cultural heteroglossia in many masculine texts requires delving deep below the surface; however, this same heteroglossia is more readily apparent in others, most notably the reports of divine dreams and visions experienced by religious women, for in these accounts the instabilities of dream and anti-feminist discourses create openings for women's voices not only to be heard but also to draw authority and power to the women and their associates.

Because it provides a useful model for examining this intersection of discourses, Laura Finke's formulation of cultural complexity forms the basis of my theoretical argument. Drawing on the work of Haraway, Serres, Latour, de Certeau, and Hayles, Finke asserts that a "theory of

⁷ I follow Lynne Dickson and others in choosing the terms "masculine" and "feminine" to differentiate between texts. This usage acknowledges "the culturally constructed nature of gender identity" as well as the impossibility of knowing the biological sex of the "author" of many medieval texts, if indeed an "author" as we understand it existed. In my adaptation of Dickson's usage, the term "masculine" designates texts that attempt to express "monolithic and culturally sanctioned discourses . . . of patriarchal desires (such as anti-feminism)." The term "feminine" designates texts expressing clear, even if collaborative, alternatives to complete "masculine (patriarchal) hegemony" (70, n. 23). Lynne Dickson, "Deflection in the Mirror: Feminine Discourse in the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer: The Yearbook of the New Chaucer Society* 15 (1993): 61 - 90.

complexity reveals the messiness behind the illusion of unified narratives about the world. . . . The concept of complexity enables us more completely to articulate . . . that culture is the collective means by which societies represent themselves to themselves.”⁸ Finke’s model allows for the expression of “intersecting and competing interests of different groups” or for individuals to be perceived even while discursive attempts to erase or cover over challenges to a monologic narrative of culture and history are at work.⁹ Heavily influenced by the Bakhtinian concept of heteroglossia, this theory asserts that, although they are “masked by traditional linguistic concepts,” all utterances are “always inhabited by the voice of the ‘other,’ or of many others, because the interests of race, class, gender, ethnicity, age, and any number of other related ‘accents’ intersect in any utterance.”¹⁰ Distinguishing these accents, however, is most difficult where the diversity in a culture is minimal and the dominant discourse is strong. In the English Middle Ages and Renaissance, of course, masculine, anti-feminist discourse is both powerful and pervasive. Although debates on the “woman question” have their place in these periods, anti-feminist discourse has often been perceived as a Foucauldian, “tightly controlled and organized” institution of authority and discipline rather than an example of Bakhtian dialogism.¹¹

However, even Foucault’s discourse of power may be seen to allow for a theoretical realm of complexity, for while he asserts that the term “discourse” has a variety of meanings including “a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements,” he also acknowledges that *between* the “fundamental codes” that regulate a culture and the “scientific

⁸ Laurie Finke, *Feminist Theory, Women's Writing, Reading Women Writing* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), 7-8.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹¹ Thomas Schmitz, *Modern Literary Theory and Ancient Texts: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 142.

theories or the philosophical interpretations which explain why order exists” lies a domain where “the codes of language, perception, and practice are criticized, and rendered partially invalid.”¹² Although for Foucault this interstice is the site of some originary, “anterior,” and “pure experience” of order that is not analogous to Fiske’s formulation of cultural complexity, it is, by definition, a gap in the façade of monologic discourse perpetuated by established hierarchies. I argue that, for the Middle Ages and Renaissance, it is in this inchoate middle realm that the crevices in hegemonic discourses become detectable. Through these openings we may distinguish discursive polyphony, but it is “more confused, more obscure, and probably less easy to analyse” than Fiske’s model might initially suggest.¹³ Because it may be posited *between* authorized regulatory codes and the scientific, philosophical, and (for the Middle Ages and Renaissance) theological theories that explain them, discursive cultural complexity exemplifies liminality and, therefore, may be characterized by what Caroline Walker Bynum characterizes as “suspension of normal rules and roles” as well as by “inversion.”¹⁴ In this regard, cultural complexity is not unlike dream space, where the borders between mundane existence and the supernatural, between the body and the spirit, and between the diabolical and the divine are often blurred or erased. Dream space and discursive complexity are both liminal and, therefore, fraught with interpretive uncertainty.¹⁵ It is, perhaps, this shared liminal quality

¹² Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972), 80; Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xx-xxi. Foucault posits this “middle region” as “the most fundamental of all” and as “anterior to words, perceptions, and gestures, which are then taken to be more or less exact . . . expressions of it;” however, I do not intend to argue that any certain discourse in the complex I am examining is somehow original or more true than any other, only that they interact in complicated and sometimes surprising ways.

¹³ Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, xxi.

¹⁴ Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 30.

¹⁵ Social anthropologist Victor Turner asserts that liminality is widely “regarded as dangerous, inauspicious, or polluting to persons, objects, events, and relationships.” Similarly, Mary Douglas argues

that permits the discovery of cultural complexity at the intersection of the discourses of dreaming and misogyny.

1.2 The Discourse of Dreaming

Because it challenges accepted categories and disrupts perceptions of the acceptable and the imaginable, liminality is the most intriguing and the most disturbing characteristic of dreams and visions. Existing neither entirely in the ordinary world of bodies and consciousness nor entirely in the sphere of the divine, dreams and visions have always tantalized the imagination. Although they are recognized as potentially meaningless, dreams and visions have also represented the remarkable possibility of a borderland in which terrestrial, corporeal humans may interact with the other-worldly, incorporeal unknown, whether that region is understood to be the transcendent realms of heaven and hell or the deep recesses of the human psyche. The earliest recorded theories and practices constituting the discourse of dreaming demonstrate the difficulty of determining the exact nature of any particular dream or vision and tend to be based on an assumption of matter/spirit or body/mind dualism.¹⁶ Some

that pollution and danger characterize those entities and situations that defy or challenge classificatory systems. A theory of discursive complexity forces us to encounter cultures as messy mixtures of ideological systems suspended in some particular place and time rather than as comfortable unified narratives of origin and telos. In this way complexity mirrors dream space, where origins and teloi hardly exist and systems of organization and classification are often inverted or twisted almost beyond recognition. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1966); Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), 100.

¹⁶ This concept is sometimes characterized as Cartesian but is, of course, an ancient idea variously articulated by, for example, Zoroaster, Plato, and Mani. Its persistence in philosophy of thought, however, cannot solely be thought of as deriving from these ancient versions of the idea, as its rearticulation century after century seems to arise again and again from deep independent thought about the nature of human life and sentience. Like dualism, monism has many philosophical manifestations but can be generally defined as a perception of unity in spite of the appearance of difference and separation understood by dualists. For

ancient texts clearly understand a dream to be a threshold allowing interaction between the physical body and the divine. In fourth century Greece, for example, the Asclepian healing practice of incubation depended upon the liminal nature of dreaming: the ailing person was to sleep at the shrine where he would be visited in a dream by the god and either cured or told what remedy to try.¹⁷ Other nearly contemporaneous texts, such as Aristotle's *On Dreams* and *On Prophecy in Sleep*, assert that dreams are almost certainly nothing more than products of the body and mind and are only predictive or meaningful by coincidence.¹⁸ Still other ancient theories have attempted to define the nature of dreams and visions even as they acknowledge the unavoidable uncertainty of dream classification. For example, *Regimen*, attributed to Hippocrates, divides dreams into two categories, "those that were divine and required religious interpretation and those that were firmly within the sphere of the doctor," i.e. transcendent dreams and bodily dreams.¹⁹ Artemidorus's *Oneirocritica*, a highly influential ancient text considered the most important attempt at a scientific approach to dreaming from the pre-Christian era until the eighteenth century, clearly asserts that divination from dreams is valid but also attempts to treat dreaming and divination scientifically through "explanation of dreams

the purposes of this project, I use the term "dualism" with regard to a conception of mind or spirit as distinct from and superior to matter or body. I use the term "monism" with regard to the opposing conception that the philosophy of mind/matter or spirit/body dualism is a false dichotomy and the idea that human existence is (or should be) a union of body and spirit in harmonious relationship. This is not to deny that a monist may accept a hierarchical model for body/spirit relations, but to assert that monism understands these manifestations of being to operate as a unified whole rather than as opposing forces contending for dominance in human experience.

¹⁷ Vivian Nutton, *Ancient Medicine* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2004), 109-110.

¹⁸ Aristotle, *Aristotle: On the Soul, Parva Naturalia, on Breath*, trans. W. S. Hett (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 348-385.

¹⁹ Nutton, 113.

dream types, dream formation, and the possibilities of using dreams.”²⁰ Commentary emphasizing the importance of correct dream interpretation to medical diagnoses, found in the work of the Roman physician Galen and transmitted to medieval medicine through the work of Avicenna, also influenced medieval and early modern oneiric, or dream, theory. Each classical source relied upon by dream theorists of the Middle Ages and Renaissance showed interest in the greater or lesser relation of dreams and visions to the body and the supernatural, and this relation became the basis of the most elaborate dream theories drawn upon during these periods.

The nature of dreams and visions was no more easily defined in early Christian theology than it had been in classical thought. Old Testament dreamers and interpreters of dreams such as Jacob, Joseph, and Daniel were seen as evidence that God did give, or at least had at one time given, revelatory dreams and visions to both devout and non-devout men; however, in the writings of early Christian fathers meaningful dreams are more often attributed to demonic than to divine sources. Guy G. Stroumsa explores the origins of the deeply conflicted understanding of dreams found in the writings of early church fathers. He concludes that demons rather than divine messengers are considered the sources of meaningful dreams and that “significant and legitimate dreams and visions usually remain those of religious virtuosi

²⁰ Christine Walde, "Dream Interpretation in a Prosperous Age?," in *Dream Cultures: Explorations in the Comparative History of Dreaming*, ed. David Shulman and Guy G. Stroumsa (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 125-127. Guy G. Stroumsa contends that neither “Aristotle’s tractate on dreams” nor “Artemidorous’s useful distinctions between a mere dream (*enupion*), and a significant, prophetic dream (*oneiros*)” had much effect during the Hellenistic period. Nevertheless, I contend that these theories, and particularly that of Artemidorous, were essential authorities that shaped medieval and early modern thinking on dreams and visions. Guy G. Stroumsa, *Barbarian Philosophy: The Religious Revolution of Early Christianity* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 214.

. . . who know best how to avoid the devil's traps."²¹ Noting the conflicted manner in which dreams and visions were understood, Steven Kruger points out that, along with their positive role in revealing divine will or philosophical truth, in their perceived potential to predict the future dreams could also be associated with fortune-telling or other pagan practices.²² Tertullian, for instance, asserts that many dreams "emanate from the Devil" and that among pagans dreams are the favored means of telling the future.²³ Tatian, a follower of Justin, similarly insists that "demons . . . make men their captives . . . invading the bodies of certain persons, and producing a sense of their presence by dreams command them," while in the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies Peter argues with Simon Magus regarding the nature of dreams and asserts that no one can know whether a dream has been sent by God or not.²⁴ Stroumsa's study of early church dream philosophy is quite thorough but suffers, unavoidably, from the same tendency to self-contradict that plagues the writings of early church fathers on dreams and visions. While he repeatedly asserts that early Christians believed dreams to come almost exclusively from diabolical

²¹ Guy G. Stroumsa, "Dreams and Visions in Early Christian Discourse," in *Dream Cultures: Explorations in the Comparative History of Dreaming*, ed. David Shulman and Guy G. Stroumsa (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 204.

²² Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 7.

²³ Tertullian, "On the Soul," in *Apologetical Works and Minicius Felix Octavius*, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1962), 284-85. Tertullian argues stridently for the truth-bearing nature of dreams, but also argues that the Devil may send dreams to the Christian that are true but misleading. Moreover, he asserts that the Devil uses dreams as "temptations [. . . to] attack the saints; he never relaxes his vigor, trying to trap them while they are asleep, if he is unsuccessful while they are awake" (286).

²⁴ James Donaldson Alexander Roberts, and A. Cleveland Cox, ed., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325*, American Reprint of the Edinburgh Edition ed., 10 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994). For Tatian see Volume II; for the Pseudo Clementine Homilies see Volume III.

sources, Stroumsa also insists that with Christianity “the dream-vision report assumed a new status and dreams became the locus par excellence of religious revelation.”²⁵ Thus, we see that the ambiguity and indeterminable nature of dreams is as prevalent in Christian dream discourse as it was in pagan.

Although the early church did not deny the experience of celestial and prophetic visions, deceptive dreams and visions were perceived as dangers to the faithful just as pagan practices and rituals would be. Correct identification of a dream source in the body, in the divine, or in the diabolical was a critical need for dreamers. Stroumsa points out that because seers and fortune tellers, the natural pagan choices for dream interpretations, were rejected by Christianity, truth-bearing and revelatory dreams, visions, and interpretations were, in a sense, democratized under church teachings.²⁶ While meaningless corporeal dreams had always been experienced in every strata of society and many could also experience a significant but mysterious dream, pagan reliance on a special, gifted class to determine and proclaim the meaning of dreams and visions set their interpreters apart socially. The Christian idea that anyone who could fast, pray, and control himself enough to achieve a sufficient level of asceticism was capable of experiencing divine visions meant that, instead of those with an exceptional status or divine gift, those who could most successfully deny and discipline their bodies were more likely to experience a significant dream or vision rather than a simple bodily dream. Moreover, the greater their physical purity the more likely it became that these people could also understand the meaning of the dream or vision.²⁷ Perhaps this dualistic emphasis on the relation of significant dreaming and visions to rejection of the body constitutes the most

²⁵ Stroumsa, 209.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 209-210.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 210.

important development in Christian thinking about dreaming.²⁸ Unlike earlier dream theories, in patristic theology dreams are understood to be a measure of the relative purity of the soul.²⁹ Stroumsa observes, however, that early Christian ideas about dreaming were limited by the need to distinguish this religion from pagan practices. According to Stroumsa, because “Christian intellectuals . . . were unable to offer a systematic alternative to the cultural premises [about dreams and visions] that they were rejecting[,] . . . classification of dreams by a pagan, Macrobius,” became a significant factor in patristic teachings regarding the nature of dreams and visions.³⁰

Macrobius’s dream classification system, found in his commentary on the Ciceronian text *The Dream of Scipio* and apparently an adaptation of the system found in Artemidorus, divides dreams and visions into five types:

All dreams may be classified under five main types: 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

²⁸ Visionary experiences, though distinguished qualitatively from dreams in some theories, are almost always accorded a place in medieval and early modern dream hierarchies; in essence, a vision is often theorized as the highest form of dream. Caroline Walker Bynum asserts that medieval mystics, exegetes, and spiritual writers did not separate “[i]ntellect, soul, and sensory faculties” or use a separate vocabulary for each. She maintains that “God was known with senses that were a fusion of all the human being’s capacities to experience . . . [T]hey and their hagiographers sometimes differed over whether a vision was seen with the eyes of the body or the eyes of the mind” (151). Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*. Kruger notes that in Albert Magnus’s thirteen-tiered dream/vision hierarchy the waking vision is the highest level of dreaming (120). Stephen Russell, however, suggests that waking visions are carefully distinguished from dreams in medieval thought. J. Stephen Russell, *The English Dream Vision: Anatomy of a Form* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1988), 10.

²⁹ Stroumsa, 226.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 207.

last, the apparition, in Greek *phantasma*, which Cicero when he has occasion to use the word, calls *visum*.³¹

Dismissing the *insomnium* and *visum* out of hand because “they have no prophetic significance,” Macrobius is most interested in the three types of meaningful dreams, the *somnium*, *visio*, and *oraculum*.³² He explains that the nightmare or *insomnium* is only “caused by physical or mental distress or anxiety about the future” and is often a product of hunger or thirst, while the apparition or *visum* is a product of bodily disorientation during the passage between sleep and wakefulness.³³ As mere products of the body or of conscious waking concerns, these two types of dreams are meaningless and, thus, worthless, but the three other types, because through them “we are gifted with the power of divination,” are meaningful and have little relation to the body of the person so “gifted.”³⁴ Indeed, Macrobius asserts that truth-bearing dreams occur only when “the soul is partially disengaged from bodily functions.”³⁵ Sometimes used alongside the Macrobian scheme and sometimes as an alternative, medicalized dream classification in the Middle Ages differed from the Macrobian system, but not dramatically. Medieval physicians did differentiate between the dreams of the body and soul (which might be useful for diagnosis) and the significant dream not involving the body, but they

³¹ Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, ed. Austin P. Evans, trans. William Harris Stahl, Records of Civilization, Sources, and Studies, vol. XLVIII (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 87-88. The question of which intermediate text may have been Macrobius’s immediate source for the material from *Oneirocritica*, or even whether he was working from a source common to his work and that of Artemidorus, is unresolved (87-88, note 1). It should be noted that Calcidius produced a very similar dream hierarchy to that of Macrobius, one that appears to have influenced Christian dream theory along with the Macrobian system. See Kruger, 21-34.

³² Macrobius, 88.

³³ *Ibid.*, 88-89.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 92.

followed a three-tiered organizational scheme made up of the *somnium naturalia* “of purely physical origin,” the *somnium animale* “caused by preoccupations of the waking mind,” and the *somnium coeleste* given by God or other supernatural forces.³⁶ In each version of dream classification derived from ancient sources and repurposed for use in Christian texts, dreams and visions associated with the spiritual realm are privileged in importance, even if their importance entails a warning against them, over those of the body, including those arising from the stress of daily life.

As church fathers and later theologians strove to understand and explain dreams and visions, the dualism separating meaningful dreams from the body became more pronounced. *Liber de spiritu et anima*, a decidedly Augustinian text, includes a five-part dream classification system almost identical to that of Macrobius.³⁷ In *De Genesi ad litteram*, however, rather than offering a Macrobian discussion of dreams and visions as they come in sleep or ecstatic experience, Augustine instead relates dreaming to vision *qua* vision. For Augustine vision exists in three types: corporeal, spiritual, and intellectual. Bodily vision, as we might guess, is ranked as least important since it is merely a product of sensory stimuli. Spiritual vision is the image formed in the mind as a reaction to physical stimulus or through memory, and intellectual vision, the highest type, is required for understanding to occur. Kruger explains that, according to Augustine, “if we are truly to comprehend images, we must employ an intellectual understanding abstracted from body, and even from the likeness of body”; therefore, significant dreams are essentially spiritual visions and are necessarily far removed from the corporeal realm.³⁸ For other church fathers dreams are classified in less esoteric terms. In the *Dialogues*, for instance, Gregory the Great acknowledges the bodily nature of dreaming along with its

³⁶ A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 57-58.

³⁷ Russell, 64. Russell attributes this text to St. Augustine, but questions regarding its authorship remain.

³⁸ Kruger, 37.

transcendent possibilities in a (somewhat unhelpful) formulation that may more accurately register the ambiguity inherent in dream discourse than any other:

It is important to realize . . . that dreams come to the soul in six ways. They are generated either by a full stomach or by an empty one, or by illusions, or by our thoughts combined with illusions, or by revelations, or by our thoughts combined with revelations.³⁹

Using various examples to demonstrate that dreams “frequently come from the illusions of the Devil,” but also “arise at times from the mystery of a revelation” or from “the thoughts in our minds as well as from revelation,” Gregory instructs his interlocutor “to be very reluctant to put one’s faith in dreams, since it is hard to tell from what source they come” (unless one is a saint who “can distinguish true revelations from the voices and illusions though an inner sensitivity”).⁴⁰ Gregory does not issue any warning about dreams generated by the stomach – a somewhat surprising omission. It seems that for him mere bodily dreams are not only insignificant but also easily recognized. The fact that significant dreams, those least associated with the body, can come from both divine and diabolical sources, however, seriously complicates dream discourse, as Gregory acknowledges in his advice to be suspicious of all dreams. Gregory certainly knew that Augustine had asserted that a “good spirit” may provide signs through visions and that “evil spirits deceive,” sometimes through lies but also at times through true dreams.⁴¹ In a similar formulation, Gregory points out that the devil, “the master of deceit,” will at times “fortell many things that are true in order finally to capture the soul by but one falsehood.”⁴² As early church fathers clearly attest, even if ambiguities regarding the relative significance of a dream could be resolved, the uncertainty concerning its source would remain.

³⁹ Odo John Zimmerman, ed., *Saint Gregory the Great: Dialogues*, The Fathers of the Church, vol. 39, series ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1959), 261.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 261-262.

⁴¹ Kruger, 48. Here I rely on Kruger’s translations of Augustine.

⁴² Zimmerman, ed., 262.

During the Middle Ages circulation of both pagan and patristic dream theories continued, and the influence of Macrobian, Gregorian, and Augustinian thoughts on dreams can be found in the writings of luminaries as diverse as Hildegard of Bingen, Richard of St. Victor, Alain de Lille, and Jean de Meun.⁴³ Anthony Spearing argues that medieval dream poets “were conscious of writing in an ancient tradition” including the “classical” works on dreaming such as Macrobius, and the “Judeo-Christian stream of influence.”⁴⁴ In fact, it is the multi-faceted conventions of dream discourse, according to Spearing, that make possible the emergence of the poet as distinct from the dreamer and the creation of a literary space in which a medieval author could write fiction. Like Spearing, Kathryn Lynch attributes the emergence of a genre, what she calls the philosophical vision, to the “synthesis” and “reinterpreta[tion of] old structures and topics in characteristic and suggestive ways.”⁴⁵ Citing the influence of Macrobian, Augustinian, and Aristotelian dream theories, Lynch traces the development of philosophical visions from Bede to Gower. Stephen Russell also demonstrates the importance of Augustinian and Macrobian dream theory on the development of the literary dream vision in the Middle Ages, observing that “while the dream writers seemed to provide a mechanism for determining the worth of dreams, their systems did little more than to deny their readers the very dreams they most needed and wanted: the *visio*, *oraculum*, and *somnium*.”⁴⁶ By the early modern period the influence of patristic writings on dreams may have diminished, but Macrobius, Artemidorous, and Galen were still used as sources of dream discourse. Carole Levin notes that Artemidorous and Macrobius served as sources for Renaissance dream writers Philip Goodwin and Thomas Hill, while as late as 1607 Thomas Walkington “was one of the last authors to use Galen as his

⁴³ Kruger, 57-82.

⁴⁴ Spearing, 4, 11.

⁴⁵ Kathryn Lynch, *The High Medieval Dream Vision: Poetry Philosophy, and Literary Form* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 52.

⁴⁶ Russell, 83.

model.”⁴⁷ With regard dreams and visions, then, traditional period divisions of Middle Ages and Renaissance have little meaning, as authorities and theories that had dominated in the Middle Ages continued to constitute the content and interpretation of dream discourse well into the early modern age.

As it had for pagans and early Christians, the relationship between dream and body presented an ongoing problem for medieval and early modern dream theorists, and we can safely assume that the inconsistencies and ambiguities of their sources were not the least of the reasons for the persistent difficulty of this question. Russell argues that literary and theoretical dreaming fell into two opposing categories—the dream as narrative and the apocalyptic dream—before the development of the medieval dream vision structure filled the gap between them. The apocalyptic dream is “an artifact transmitted by God” and is only available to “a vessel empty of earthly concerns,” which, I conclude, must include the body and physical comfort.⁴⁸ Spearing notes that the dreamer in *The Pearl* emphatically asserts that his spirit leaves his body for the duration of the vision and that this separation from the body is essential for such an experience, for had he been in the body when he saw the splendors of heaven, his human senses would have been overwhelmed to the point of death.⁴⁹ Lynch, however, sees a more positive view of the body in medieval dream formulations, claiming that the High Middle Ages were more concerned with “the union of mind and body” than with their separation. Nevertheless, she acknowledges that thinkers of this period “depended on overcoming the problem of how an immortal and immaterial soul could inhabit a mortal and physical body.”⁵⁰ Even if Lynch is correct in her assertion that medieval philosophy expressed a desire to unify mind and body, the essential nature of their division remains, in her words, a “problem.” While

⁴⁷ Carole Levin, *Dreaming in the English Renaissance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 38, 43.

⁴⁸ Russell, 39-40.

⁴⁹ Spearing, 117.

⁵⁰ Lynch, *The High Medieval Dream Vision: Poetry Philosophy, and Literary Form*, 29.

Peter Holland asserts that these medieval interpretations of dreams and dream theory remained basically unchanged throughout the early modern period, for Renaissance dreamers it seems Gregory's apparent confidence that bodily dreams were easily recognized and dismissed had diminished.⁵¹ According to Levin, "post-Reformation writers . . . tried to develop criteria by which someone could tell if the dream came from the devil, from God and the angels, or simply from severe indigestion."⁵² Moreover, for an inspired dream, the body remained an embarrassment of sorts; for even if the source of the dream were certainly diabolical, as in the case of witches, the dream experience "took place in some alternate reality while their bodies were at home asleep."⁵³ Concerns about the relation between the spirit and the body, therefore, comprise one of the most difficult areas of dream discourse. In fact, this anxiety and the troubling apprehension regarding the source of a non-bodily dream combined to produce an inescapable inconsistency and ambiguity in the discourse of dreaming throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Peter Holland, "The 'Interpretation of Dreams' in the Renaissance," in *Reading Dreams*, ed. Peter Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁵² Levin, 62.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁵⁴ A few additional interesting explorations of dreaming in the Renaissance include David Aers, "Interpreting Dreams: Freud, Milton, and Chaucer," in *Reading Dreams*, ed. Peter Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Peter Brown, "On the Borders of Middle English Dream Visions," in *Reading Dreams*, ed. Peter Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Katharine Hodgkin, Michelle O'Callaghan, and S. J. Wiseman, eds., *Reading the Early Modern Dream: Terrors of the Night*, Routledge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture (New York: Routledge, 2008); Steven F. Kruger, "Medical and Moral Authority in the Late Medieval Dream," in *Reading Dreams*, ed. Peter Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Kathryn Lynch, "Baring Bottom: Shakespeare and the Chaucerian Dream Vision," in *Reading Dreams*, ed. Peter Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

1.3 Discourse on Women

Although the narrative of misogyny, gynophobia, and sexism is so well established in the cultural history of the West as to hardly require demonstration, my present project of uncovering the gaps in this narrative through which discursive complexity can be viewed requires some discussion of the foundations, development, and elaboration of anti-feminism in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Medieval authoritative theories on women, based on patristic writings and reflecting a tradition of misogyny going back to classical Greece, demonstrate a high degree of ambivalence about women: at once characterized as the “Devil’s Gateway” and the “Bride of Christ,” any medieval woman could potentially be a malicious and destructive daughter of Eve or a holy virgin, pure and spotless before man and God, or both. Theoretically, however, she could never occupy both identities at the same time and, even if she were pure at one moment, she was highly susceptible to turning back into an evil daughter of Eve the next.⁵⁵ The two separate biblical accounts of creation, very powerful sources of this ambiguity in medieval discourse on women, are difficult to reconcile and led to persistent preference in Christian dogma for one over the other. In the “priestly” Genesis 1:27 account, God creates man, male and female, in his own image; thus woman is equal to man. The

⁵⁵ Bloch, 90. Bloch asserts that the medieval message to women was Tertullian’s: “You are at one and the same time the “Bride of Christ” and the “Devil’s Gateway,” seducer and redeemer, but nothing in between.” Mary of Egypt, for example, was the embodiment of female lust and licentiousness before her transformation into a pure, penitent hermit and, ultimately, saint. On the other hand, the author of the *Ancrene Wisse* tells the anchoresses that they, like all women, are “feble” and prone to wickedness because of their likeness to “Eve, thi mother.” He asserts that “Eve haveth monie dehtren that folhith hare moder.” Indeed, he insists that even among devoted servants of God such as anchoresses, the lovely are in need of better guarding than others perhaps less likely to fall – a clear suggestion that their purity is neither secure nor natural to them. “The Life of Our Holy Mother Mary of Egypt,” in *Medieval Sourcebook*, www.fordam.edu/halsall/basis/maryofegypt.html [accessed January 2009]; *Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Robert Hasenfratz (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000).

“Yahwist” version found in Genesis 2 tells the story of Eve’s creation from Adam’s rib. Misogynist interpretation of the second creation story reads woman as pure flesh as opposed to Adam, who is created spiritually and given life by the breath of God. Although the “priestly” version of creation from Genesis 1:27 was sometimes used by exegetes when discussing the nature of women, the “Yahwist” version found in Genesis 2:7 was, according to Howard Bloch, “most readily appropriated in the patristic and medieval period.”⁵⁶ Minimizing the priestly version that places male and female on equal footing before God, as it asserts that they are both created simultaneously and in God’s image, masculine texts emphasize Eve’s secondary and decidedly different creation from the Yahwist description. Fashioned from man’s rib, Eve is proof that women are not created in the image of God as Adam is and that women are fleshly beings where men are spiritual.⁵⁷ St. Augustine, whose frequent pronouncements regarding the nature of woman are based on a conflation of the Priestly and Yahwist versions of creation, is often blamed for the bulk of the anti-feminist tradition, although some have argued that he is less culpable in this regard than he is traditionally understood to be.⁵⁸ While Augustine does not

⁵⁶ Bloch, 23.

⁵⁷ Ambrosiaster makes the specific claim that woman was not created in the image of God, while Ambrose asserts that woman is a representation of the body as man is a representation of the mind. See David G. Hunter, “The Paradise of Patriarchy: Ambrosiaster on Woman as (Not) God’s Image,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 43 (1992); E. Ann Matter, “*De Cura Feminarum*: Augustine the Bishop, North African Women, and the Development of a Theology of Female Nature,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine*, ed. Judith Chelius Stark (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2007); Judith Chelius Stark, “Augustine on Women: In God’s Image, but Less So,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine*, ed. Judith Chelius Stark (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2007).

⁵⁸ Stark, 218-219. For an argument blaming Augustine for misogynistic discourse, see Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988). For a strong defense of Augustine, see Kari Elizabeth Borresen, *Subordination and Equivalence: The Nature and Role of Women in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas*, trans. C. H. Talbot (Washington D.C. : University Press of America, 1981). For a

strictly equate woman with body as Ambrose does, he instead equates woman with the lower intellect, concerned only with matters of quotidian existence, and man with the higher intellect, the reasoning faculty that is most like God.⁵⁹ According to this formulation, as God is spirit and only accessible to humanity through that part created in the image of God, it is only man, as mind or higher intellect, who is truly created in God's image. Woman can be considered to be the image of God as a part of general humanity, but never as gendered woman. Equating woman with the lower intellect, of course, is only slightly different from equating her with the body, as either way she is still barred from her own ontological status of spiritual being, and the logical inference with regard to dream discourse is the same in both constructs: as body *or* as lower intellect, woman should only have access to the meaningless dreams of the body or of daily stress. The dualism that permeates dream theory combines with the dualism of misogyny and leads to one inevitable conclusion: by her very nature woman should be barred from access to significant dreams associated with the spirit.

The convention firmly establishing that women are all daughters of Eve who inherit both her culpability for the Fall and her natural inclination to evil is an integral part of the patristic anti-feminism that persisted from early Christianity into the Middle Ages and Renaissance. This tradition is so well-documented in primary, historical, and critical texts that a complete set of examples would be far too vast to list here. As Frances Beer notes, the misogynistic views of "the Church Fathers . . . remained enormously popular throughout the Middle Ages . . . and were perpetuated and disseminated by means of both sermons and popular literature, century after century, to form and control attitudes towards women at all social levels."⁶⁰ Chaucer,

thorough discussion of the two versions of creation in Genesis and their implications, see J. Martin Evans, *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

⁵⁹ Stark.

⁶⁰ Frances Beer, *Women and Mystical Experience in the Middle Ages* (Bury St. Edmunds, Sussex: The Boydell Press, 1992), 4.

through the Wife of Bath, and Christine de Pizan, for two medieval examples, both rehearse the endless diatribes against women as they were passed down from authority to authority.⁶¹ Renaissance versions of this same convention of misogyny abound in the writings of Catholics and Protestants alike. Determined that women not be allowed to perform priestly duties, John Calvin cites Tertullian's anti-feminist views on women. *Malleus Maleficarum*, produced by two Dominican inquisitors in 1486, reiterates the view that woman is evil and defective because she was created from Adam's rib: ribs are bent; therefore, women are also bent towards evil.⁶² Along with masculine social and cultural hegemony, the masculine discourse of anti-feminism continued in much the same form from the foundations of Christianity through the early modern period.

This discourse, however, is not the monolith it may appear to be, for misogyny, like dream discourse, is fraught with contradiction and ambiguity. As Bloch has demonstrated, the either/or scenario of patristic thought constructs woman as an impossibility; she "can only be conceived of as an idea rather than a human being." As such, woman is "poised between contradictory abstractions implicated in each other, . . . idealized, subtilized, frozen into a passivity that cannot be resolved[; . . . she embodies] ambiguity, paradox, enigma."⁶³ Fictionalized women of these periods, who are, of course, for the most part the products of masculine texts, tend to reflect the dominant ideology and, therefore, both demonstrate and

⁶¹ Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Canterbury Tales," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987); Christine De Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Roalind Brown-Grant (New York: Penguin Classics, 2000).

⁶² Julia O'Faolain and Lauro Martines, ed., *Not in God's Image* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 202; Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Montague Summers (London: Arrow Books Ltd., 1971), 119. The *Malleus* also insists, in line with patristic misogyny, that in terms of "carnal lust" women are "insatiable," as primarily fleshly beings, then, women are consumed by the sins of the flesh (122).

⁶³ Bloch, 90.

naturalize the polarized possibilities of anti-feminist discourse. Real medieval and early modern women, as far as we can tell from available historical and literary sources, instead face the challenge of negotiating an identity within, through, or in spite of the discursive restraints of hegemonic masculinity. Caroline Walker Bynum, whose compelling assessment of the uses of food made by holy women of the Middle Ages addresses the force of antifeminist discourse on feminine identity and experience, asserts that

it . . . seems possible to suggest, as the vast majority of historians have done, that women understood themselves to be symbols of the flesh, saw fasting and other forms of asceticism as weapons for routing that flesh . . . in an effort to rise to the level of spirit and to become, metaphorically speaking, male.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, Bynum interprets the manipulation of food and feeding by medieval women, especially by saints and mystics, as a means of controlling their environments and circumstances as well as their bodies.⁶⁵ Using the theoretical construct of complexity, we might say that for Bynum the intersection of the discourses of anti-feminism and food becomes a site through which the play of cooperating and competing discourses are unveiled. I propose that the intersection of the discourses of misogyny and dreaming operates in much the same way. In dream discourse ambiguity characterizes the body's relationship to the transcendent, and in anti-feminist discourse instability arises from the problematic polarization of woman's identity. When a woman dreams, the two discourses intersect, and their contradictions are multiplied. When a woman's dream then becomes a text, a rich site of cultural complexity emerges.

1.4 Demonstrating Discursive Complexity through the Dreams of Women

Any given dream may impart a revelation, a deception, or nothing at all; while any woman may represent the purity of Mary or the depravity of Eve and may slide from one signifying position to the other. I argue that their dualistic indeterminacy and ambiguity make women, dreams, and visions in medieval and early modern English culture the quintessence of cultural complexity. The remaining chapters of this dissertation offer readings of various

⁶⁴ Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, 218.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 218-219.

English-language texts in which women dream or women's dreams are reported, and my overall aim is to analyze consistency and variation in the discursive complex of dreaming and anti-feminism through pre-modern English texts. In Chapters 2 and 3 I argue that beneath the monolithic veneer of anti-feminism found in texts from the English Middle Ages and Renaissance, discursive patterns that challenge misogyny are detectable because of the intersection of the unstable discourses of dream theory and anti-feminism. I argue that fictitious women's dreams in masculine texts of the Middle Ages and Renaissance reveal a strain of anxiety in masculine hegemonic culture regarding women's participation in the spiritual realm. Generally, this angst is negotiated by a dualistic alignment of women's dreams and visions with deception, danger, and the diabolical, but I demonstrate that the inconsistencies in the discourses of dreaming and anti-feminism are discernible through this façade and reveal the polyphony of the culture in spite of its univocal appearance. In Chapter 2 I examine a variety of medieval texts in which women dream or experience visions, including *Genesis B*, poetic and dramatic texts depicting the dream of Pilate's wife, and dreaming women in the works of Chaucer such as *Criseyde*, *Dido*, and *the Wife of Bath*. Dramatic texts from the Renaissance including *Sir Thomas More*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Henry VI Part II*, *The White Devil*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* provide the dreaming and visionary women that I consider in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4 I argue that cooperation rather than competition between these same unstable discourses in reports of real women's dreams opens a fragile but significant monistic, rather than dualistic, space for feminine power to operate alongside masculine dominance. Here I analyze the purposes and effects of reports of dreams and visions for the abbess Hild, Christina of Markyate, Margery Kempe, and Elizabeth Barton. In Chapter 5 I demonstrate the positive effect of Milton's monism on the interaction between the discourse of dream theory and the discourse of anti-feminism in his fictional representation of a dreaming woman, Eve in *Paradise Lost*. Wherever dreaming women appear in texts throughout the pre-modern period, dream theory and masculine theories on women combine in a discursive

complex that supports patriarchy, but they also provide a site for the expression of cultural complexity to challenge masculine monovocality.

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION

DREAMS, DECEPTION, AND THE DAUGHTERS OF EVE

2.1 Introduction

Oneiric theories from the Middle Ages characterize dreams and visions as potential sites of great power because they may be liminal experiences through which one learns the will of God, gains access to transcendent or prophetic knowledge, or receives a commission from heaven. Texts in which revelatory dreams and visions are reported often transfer the authority of the dream or vision to the dreamer, thereby legitimizing speech and acts that might otherwise appear to be challenges to hegemonic culture. Cædmon's dream, related in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, is one example of this process. Because Cædmon dreams that an angel commands him to compose hymns in English, English becomes a divinely authorized language suitable for Christian worship.⁶⁶ Cædmon's *oraculum* is not far removed in authoritative power from the dreams of Old Testament prophets and benefits from the continued belief expressed in medieval dream theory that such experiences remained possible for the spiritually pure. When women dream or experience visions in medieval texts, then, the theoretical potential of dreaming to confer access to transcendent truth and the consequent elevation of the dreamer or visionary to the status of a spiritual authority pose a threat to the dominant discourse of misogyny. Masculine texts generally attempt to foreclose this possible source of authority for women by associating women's dreams and visions with the potential for deception; however, such attempts at monologic antifeminist narrative are fractured when the ambiguities of the discourses of dreaming and misogyny intersect. While the connection between women's

⁶⁶ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (London: Penguin, 1990), 248 - 51.

dreams and deception is very strong, by focusing on the discontinuities present in texts such as *Genesis B*, Middle English depictions of the dream of Pilate's wife, and the works of Chaucer, we uncover competing discursive paradigms that reveal an otherwise hidden cultural heteroglossia.

Throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, masculine accounts of men's dreams and visions tend to follow a fairly standard pattern in which the dreamer gains philosophical, religious, personal, or social understanding through the process of dreaming. Deviations from this form mark individual male dream-visions but do not disturb the general pattern.⁶⁷ Even when the men's dreams depicted in masculine texts are simply part of another narrative not of the dream-vision genre – the list of significant dreams experienced by men that Chanticleer describes to Pertelote, for example – the sense remains that in such texts men's dreams or visions are ultimately truth-bearing and revelatory. When masculine texts depict women's dreams or visions, on the other hand, the truth-bearing nature of the incident often comes into question, even if the dream or vision falls into a meaningful theoretical category. Indeed, rather than offering a glimpse of women's access to transcendent truth or wisdom, masculine depictions of women's dreams and visions often serve to reinforce anti-feminist associations of women with deception, regardless of whether the woman is represented as deceived, deceiver, or both.

As I discussed in the first chapter, dream theories going back to classical times offer multiple paradigms for determining the value or significance of any type of dream and reveal skepticism regarding the ultimate importance of any dream-vision experience. Uncertainty

⁶⁷ These range from *The Romance of the Rose*, where in spite of the numerous and lengthy philosophical diversions the telos of the dream is achievement of a goal rather than increased knowledge or insight, to *The House of Fame*, where the work ends abruptly and neither the dream nor the message is completed.

regarding the exact nature of these experiences also permeates theories of the Middle Ages.⁶⁸ In many formulations of their properties and of the proper responses to them, dreams and visions are as directly linked to deception as they are to revelation and truth in other theoretical constructs. Noting the conflicted manner in which dreams and visions were understood, Kruger points out that, along with their positive role in revealing divine will or philosophical truth, in their perceived potential to predict the future dreams could also be associated with fortune-telling or other pagan practices.⁶⁹ Tertullian asserts that many dreams “emanate from the Devil” and that among pagans dreams are the favored means of telling the future.⁷⁰ Gregory the Great, whose basic theory regarding the origin of dreams is convoluted at best, portrays dreams as misleading and vain and notes that the Old Testament warns against the divination of dreams.⁷¹ Later theologians echo their classical and patristic forebears regarding dreams and visions. Acknowledging with Aristotle that dreams can be attributed to somatic and psychological causes, Thomas Aquinas also asserts that dreams can be the work of either benevolent or malevolent spirits, with those from the malevolent spirits certainly intended to deceive and confound the Christian who unwisely heeds them, while John of Trevisa’s Middle English translation of Bartholomeus Anglicus directly attributes some dreams to “Satanas his aungel” in

⁶⁸ See “Chapter 1: Discourse, Dreams, and Women,” for a summary of various medieval dream theories. Strousma explores the origins of the deeply conflicted understanding of dreams found in the writings of early church fathers. He concludes that generally “dreams are [believed to be] sent by demons” rather than God and that “significant and legitimate dreams and visions usually remain those of religious virtuosi [. . .] who know best how to avoid the devil’s traps.” Strousma, 204.

⁶⁹ Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, 7.

⁷⁰ Tertullian, 284-85. Tertullian argues stridently for the truth-bearing nature of dreams, but also argues that the Devil may send dreams to the Christian that are true but misleading. Moreover, he asserts that the Devil uses dreams as “temptations [. . . to] attack the saints; he never relaxes his vigor, trying to trap them while they are asleep, if he is unsuccessful while they are awake” (286).

⁷¹ Russell, 67-8. Russell quotes Gregory’s references to Ecclesiastes 34:7 and Leviticus 19:26.

disguise attacking humans in dreams designed to “begile and deceyue.”⁷² This deceptive potential of dreams and visions goes beyond the mere meaninglessness attributed to such categories as *insomnium*, *visum*, or *phantasma* (those arising from the body and from daily activities as defined by Macrobius) or the *somnia naturale* and *animale* (as defined by medicalized dream theory). Instead, this potential can be viewed as the perversion of meaningful dreaming. A deceptive dream or vision is similar to the *somnium*, *visio*, or *oraculum* of Macrobius and the *somnium coeleste* of medical theory in the sense that it does impart a message from beyond the physical world; however, it fails to reveal truth or wise counsel and instead works to a mischievous or malicious end. A deceptive dream or vision has meaning, but at best that meaning is ambiguous, and at worst it leads to calamity for the unsuspecting victim. Added to the general theoretical concern that meaningless dreams may be misconstrued as meaningful and improperly trusted or valued, the perceived danger posed by demonically inspired dreams or visions reveals deep anxiety regarding the nature of any of these experiences.

Like dreams, women are linked to injurious mendacity in medieval and early modern formulations because of the belief that “through [her] speech” Eve “sowed discord between men and God.”⁷³ Deceived herself by the serpent in the Garden of Eden, Eve nevertheless shares guilt for the deception, for in passing the forbidden fruit on to Adam the deceived woman became the deceiver.⁷⁴ Although the Genesis 3 account of the Fall says only that Eve gave

⁷² *Ibid.*, 71-3.

⁷³ Bloch, 15. Bloch notes that in myth the sirens and Pandora also link women's lies to the destruction of men, but he acknowledges that the Genesis creation and fall account is the primary source used to justify misogynistic views of women in the Middle Ages.

⁷⁴ Tertullian said of all women, “you are the one who persuaded him whom the devil was not capable of persuading,” and St. Ambrose asserts that “The woman was the first to be deceived and it was she who deceived the man.” Tertullian, *On the Apparel of Women*, trans. S. Thelwall (Whitefish, Montana:

Adam the fruit and he ate it, Eve is nevertheless consistently understood to have used both her manipulative speech and her sexual allure to seduce Adam into sin; thus it is Eve, rather than Adam, who is deemed ultimately responsible for the Fall. Moreover, as it is endlessly reproduced in patristic texts, the misogynist tirade found in Jerome's "Against Jovinian" portrays women as the very embodiment of deception. Claiming to refer to the writings of Theophrastus, Jerome asserts that men are able to inspect "[h]orses, asses, cattle," and every other commodity before buying, but "a wife is the only thing that is not shown before she is married, for fear she may not give satisfaction."⁷⁵ Woman is not only capable of deception; she is the reification of deception, and through this reification deception itself is gendered female.⁷⁶

At this intersection of dream theory and misogyny, we find a number of English texts in which the imbrication of deception, women, and dreams functions to reinforce anti-feminism. Because numerous cooperative and competing discourses are at work throughout these texts, the integration of specific cultural paradigms, in spite of their smooth anti-feminist façades, can also be teased apart to reveal the dualistic ambiguity of medieval thinking regarding women and dream-visions. The general heteroglossia of medieval culture that is often hidden under the illusion of patristic monovocality becomes apparent as we examine the logical inconsistencies and discursive paradoxes created at the junction of dream discourse and misogyny. From the complicated inclusion of a vision for Eve in *Genesis B*, through Middle English depictions of the dream of Pilate's wife, to Chaucer's more subtle and perhaps less clearly misogynistic portrayals of women dreaming, we find masculine texts in which the integration of multiple discourses successfully fuses diabolical dreaming with a general anti-feminism. Nevertheless,

Kessinger, 2004), 4; Ambrose, *Hexameron, Paradise, Cain and Abel*, trans. J. J. Savage, *Fathers of the Church*, vol. 42 (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1961), 301.

⁷⁵ Alcuin Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts* (Oxford [England] : Clarendon Press: New York, 1992), 71.

⁷⁶ For a complete discussion of the association of women, words, and deception, see Bloch, chapter 1.

the ambiguity and uncertainty of dream theory allows us to detect inconsistencies and gaps in the apparent seamlessness of this fusion.

2.2 Genesis B

The depiction of Eve in the Anglo-Saxon poetic text *Genesis B* is one of the earliest and most fascinating examples in English of this particular integration of cultural codes. This text demonstrates both of the trajectories that the association of women's dreams and deception may take since it depicts the first woman as both deceived and deceiver. The Old English *Genesis B* is thought to be a West Saxon transcription of an earlier Old Saxon re-telling of the Fall of Man that was somehow interpolated into the text of the Old English *Genesis A*.⁷⁷ *Genesis B* begins *in medias res* with God pronouncing his commandment to Adam and Eve not to eat of one particular tree in the Garden of Eden and then cuts precipitously to the back-story of Lucifer's discontent in heaven, rebellion against God, and ignominious fall with his rebellious mob into the fires of hell. Defiant in defeat, Satan vows to take his revenge on Adam since he cannot take it on God:

*we þæs sculon hycgan georne,
þæt we on adame gif we æfre mægen,
and on his eafrum swa some andan gebetan,
onwendan him þær willen sines gif we hit mægen wihte apencan.*

(This we shall earnestly resolve, that we on Adam, if we are ever able, and on his posterity in like manner, will repay this grudge, will overturn there God's will, if we can at all conceive it.)⁷⁸

Satan, unable to free himself from the chains God has placed on him, sends a messenger to deceive Adam and Eve and thus despoil God's new creation. This evil messenger

⁷⁷ A. N. Doane discusses the relationship between *Genesis B* and the Old Saxon Vatican *Genesis* in the introduction to his edition of both poems. A. N. Doane, ed., *The Saxon Genesis: An Edition of the West Saxon Genesis B and the Old Saxon Vatican Genesis* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991). See especially pages 43-54.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, lines 397-400. All quotations from the poem will be taken from this edition and will be henceforth reference by line numbers in the text. Translations are my own.

first presents himself to Adam as God's messenger sent to instruct Adam to eat the previously prohibited fruit, but Adam is not fooled by the devil's words or by his claim to be a servant of God.⁷⁹ Angry but undaunted, the fiend tries a different tactic on Eve, assuring her that Adam is endangering himself and Eve by refusing to eat the fruit as God has ordered. He then insists,

æt þisses ofetes. þonne wurðað þin eagan swa leoht
þæt þu meahst swa wide ofer woruld ealle
geseon siððan and selfes stol
herran þines and habban his hyldo forð. (564-67)

(Eat this fruit! Then your eyes will become so clear that you may after see so widely over all the world, and the throne of your master, and have his ongoing favor.)

This text is clearly drawing on the wording of the Vulgate account of man's Fall, in which the serpent tells Eve that her eyes will be opened when she eats the fruit; however, here the idea of opening Eve's eyes is taken in a different direction.⁸⁰ Rather than suggesting that she will now know good and evil as God does, the fiend of *Genesis B* offers Eve a vision surpassing human sight and allowing her first-hand knowledge of the throne of God. Such an offer of visionary experience has more in common with the dream-vision experiences of the *Revelation*, the

⁷⁹ Doane asserts that in spite of many readings to the contrary, the devil's appearance here is not actually angelic in spite of his claim to angelic status. *Ibid.*, 141-42.

⁸⁰ The question of whether *Genesis B's* alterations to the Vulgate account of the Fall are original or derivations from other sources has occasionally been addressed. F.N. Robinson believed that many of the elements deemed "original" by other critics are in fact borrowed from or confusions of the Latin *Adae et Evae* or the Greek *Revelation of Moses*, apocryphal texts that may have been available in some form at the time and place of the Old Saxon *Genesis's* composition. A certain shininess around the forbidden tree is present in these sources; however, it is not associated with a dream or vision. Similarly, Eve does dream in these sources, but her dreams postdate the Fall and are unrelated to her seduction of Adam. Regardless of potential sources that may have suggested Eve's radiant dream in the Old Saxon *Genesis*, the formulation of Eve and her dream as deceivers of mankind in the Old English *Genesis B* is the first such English language portrayal of the Fall as well as one of the earliest texts in which a woman dreams in the English language.

Vision of St. Paul, and the *Dream of Scipio* than with the straightforward idea of complete knowledge offered in the biblical account. In framing the temptation offered by the fiend to Eve in dream-vision terms, *Genesis B* associates the deception of Eve by the serpent with the sort of evil and deceptive dreams warned about by church authorities such as Gregory and Thomas Aquinas.

Immediately after Eve eats the fruit, she is granted the promised vision, which is related in language that focuses on both its beauty and its deceptive quality:

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| | <i>þa meahte heo wide geseon</i> |
| <i>þurh þæs laðan læn</i> | <i>þe hie mid ligenum beswac,</i> |
| <i>dearnenga bedrog</i> | <i>þe hire for his dædum com,</i> |
| <i>þæt hire þuhte hwitre</i> | <i>heofon and eorðe</i> |
| <i>and eall þeos woruld wlitigre</i> | <i>and geweorc godes</i> |
| <i>micel and mihtig</i> | <i>þeah heo hit þurh monnes geþeaht</i> |
| <i>ne sceawode</i> | <i>Ac se sceaða georne</i> |
| <i>swicode ymb þa sawle</i> | <i>þe hire ær þa siene onlah,</i> |
| <i>þæt heo swa wide</i> | <i>wlitan meahte</i> |
| <i>ofer heofonrice. (600 – 09)</i> | |

(Then could she see widely because of the fiend's gift with which he betrayed her through lies and insidiously beguiled her, then because of his deed it came to pass that the heavens and earth seemed brighter to her and all of this world more radiant and all God's great and mighty work, though it was not shown through human wisdom. Rather the fiend eagerly deceived her soul by the vision he had granted so that she was able to gaze widely over heaven's kingdom.)

Moreover, the fiend immediately reinforces the idea that he has brought this new radiance to her directly from God: "*nu scineð þe leoht fore/glædlic ongean þæt ic from gode brohte*" (Now the light shines brightly towards you that I brought from God) (614-15). The fiend then encourages her to take the fruit to Adam to persuade him to eat of it as well. Notably, Satan's messenger advises Eve first to tell Adam of "*hwilce gesihðe hæfst*" (the vision she has had) in order to convince him to eat the fruit (617). Eve's vision, then, is the primary tool the fiend intends her to use to deceive Adam, and this is exactly what she does.

Unlike Eve in the Vulgate, *Genesis B's* Eve does not merely hand Adam the fruit, but instead speaks persuasively to him about its desirability and the positive consequences of eating it. In language designed to convince Adam not only that the fiend is truly a messenger of

God, but also that the fruit itself is the source of transcendent experience, she soon begins to describe her vision:

ic mæg heonan geseon
hwær he sylf siteð, þæt is suð and east,
welan bewanden se ðas woruld ge sceop.
geseo ic him his englas ymbe hweorfan
mid feðerhaman, ealra folca mæst,
wereda wynsumast. hwa meahste me swelc gewit gifan
gif hit gegnunge god ne onsende,
heofones waldend? Gehyran mæg ic rume
and swa wide geseon on woruld ealle
ofer þas sidan gesceaft. ic mæg swegles gamen
gehyran on heofnum. wearð me on hige leohte
utan and innan siðþan ic þæs ofættes onbat. (666 – 77)

(I can see from here where he himself sits, that is south and east, wrapped in riches, he that shaped the world. I see his angels hovering around him with feathered wings, greatest of all folk, most joyful people. Who might give me such knowledge if God did not certainly send it, heaven's ruler? I can hear far and wide and so widely see over this immense creation. I can hear splendid joys in heaven. My spirit has become light without and within, since I tasted this fruit.)

This description is far more detailed than the first one given of Eve's heavenly vision, in which she is only said to see the heavens and the earth as brighter and more beautiful than they appeared before.⁸¹ Here Eve describes seeing the actual throne of God, as the fiend had earlier promised she would, and also describes a sort of celestial music. It is unclear whether Eve is recounting what she has actually seen in more detail than the narrator had previously given or whether she is exaggerating the quality of her vision in order to manipulate Adam. What is clear is that the same persuasive promise of seeing the throne of God given to her by the fiend is passed on by Eve in even more enticing language; Eve, then, embellishes the description of her

⁸¹ Doane reads the entire passage as an indictment of Eve as willingly deceived. He notes that it is Eve, not the fiend, who gives the dream its content and Eve alone who sees the fiend as an angel due to her eager acceptance of his control of her reason. This reading depends upon understanding the devil's snake-like appearance as entirely ordinary, or as Doane has it "neutral," thus requiring that Eve choose to "see" him as something special and worthy of her trust. The fact that the serpent speaks, however, works against an assumption that Eve should rightly perceive him as nothing more than an ordinary snake. Doane, ed., 146, 141.

dream-vision in an effort to control and seduce Adam. Whatever she may believe about the true source of her vision and the brightness of her mind, the dream-vision report here becomes part of the deception leading to the Fall of Man. Eve is certainly “*forlæd mid ligenum*” (deceived by the lies) of Satan’s messenger, but through the reporting of her vision, willingly or unwillingly, she also deceives.

In fairness, it must be said that the text does not suggest that Eve intends to deceive Adam; quite the contrary, much effort seems to be given to excusing Eve and attributing the best rather than the worst intentions to her. As has often been noted, we are directly told in line 708 that “*heo dyde hit þeah þurh holdne hyge*” (she did it though through a loyal heart).⁸² Doane reads this line as a suggestion that Eve has abandoned her proper loyalty to Adam and has transferred her allegiance to the devil.⁸³ This interpretation, however, glosses over the power of the fiend’s argument to Eve that she needs to follow his advice in order to save Adam and herself from God’s wrath. The power of this motivation for Eve demonstrates that her loyalty remains properly placed and that her intentions are not, in fact, to assist the devil but to help Adam. In addition, Eve’s physical beauty plays no small part in Adam’s seduction, and her splendor is repeatedly emphasized in the lines leading up to his acquiescence to the crime.

⁸² Jane Chance, *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature*, 1st ed. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1986); Michael D. Cherniss, "Heroic Ideals and the Moral Climate of *Genesis B*," *Modern Language Quarterly* 30 (1969); J. M. Evans, "*Genesis B* and Its Background," *The Review of English Studies* 14, no. 54 (1963). For a variety of views regarding Eve's relative intelligence and culpability, ranging from blaming her naivete to praising her as Adam's intellectual superior, see the following articles. Alain Renoir, "Eve's I.Q. Rating: Two Sexist Views of *Genesis B*," in *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, ed. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); John F. Vickrey, "The Vision of Eve in *Genesis B*," *Speculum* 44, no. 1 (1969); Rosemary Woolf, "The Fall of Man in *Genesis B* and the *Mystere D'adam*," in *Art and Doctrine: Essays on Medieval Literature*, ed. Heather ODonoghue (London: Hambledon Press, 1986).

⁸³ Doane, ed., 146.

Although it is part of her seductive power, Eve's beauty and Adam's attraction to her are necessary parts of the divine plan of creation and are not treated as though they add to her blame. Rather, they seem almost to operate in her defense as persuasive qualities she possesses but does not control. Nevertheless, we are also clearly told that Eve "*wæs hine on helpe [. . .]to forlæranne*" (was of help to him in the deception), that in fact she aided the fiend in his seduction (702). Her shining womanly beauty combines with the brilliant force of her deceptive dream description and her persistent efforts to persuade Adam to do as she wishes, leading to death and destruction for all mankind. Indeed, this combination of forces most clearly reveals the manner in which this text weaves the various theoretical and patristic discourses at its command into an ideological statement regarding the dangerous and deceptive relation between women and dreams.

So far, then, *Genesis B* appears to be a text firmly entrenched in and expressive of a well-known and undisputed medieval antifeminism, as Doane's reading of the episode demonstrates: "I take this to mean that in the final analysis the deception is Eve's own self-deception, that the poet's position is orthodox, presenting the full guilt and responsibility of Eve."⁸⁴ However, with a little effort we can distinguish the combination of discourses that produce this apparent monovocality and the difficulties presented when the ambiguities of one overlap with the ambiguities of the other.⁸⁵ The much-described interpolation of Germanic retainer/lord relationships between Satan and God and between Adam and God into the

⁸⁴ Ibid., 147.

⁸⁵ As a West Saxon translation of an Old Saxon poem that retold a story from the Latin Vulgate Bible, *Genesis B* is a text steeped in literal polyglossia, and the conflicting "languages" of both Germanic/pagan and Christian cultural patterns at work in the text have long been acknowledged. Although some still debate the West Saxon origin and interpolation claim, Lucas offers it as fact based on the work of Sievers and others. *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), s.v. "*Genesis*."

scriptural story is only one instance of this conflation of discourses.⁸⁶ In a similar manner, both traditional Anglo-Saxon depictions of women and those of Christian culture mark the text, and the use of both of these languages in *Genesis B* produces an appearance of patristic monovocality that is oddly uncomfortable. Belanoff, for example, notes the conventionality of literary depictions of strong, beautiful, and shining women in Anglo-Saxon poetry, and discusses similarities between these images of gleaming, bright, and glowing women in pagan texts and depictions of female saints and the Virgin Mary in Christian works.⁸⁷ However, Belanoff points out that brightness and beauty also form a connection between *Genesis B*'s Satan and Eve, as both are conspicuously described in terms of brightness and shininess (Satan before the Fall and Eve throughout the work). For Belanoff this association with shininess is part of an intermixture of the brightness of traditional Germanic descriptions of strong women and "the influence of ecclesiastical anti-feminism on poetry."⁸⁸ This connection has a third element in the dream-vision itself. Just as Satan and Eve are linked through language of light, Eve's vision overflows with brightness and radiance that mark it as part of the same image group. If Belanoff's contention is correct, then the brightness and radiance of Eve's vision are also a part of that anti-feminist move.

⁸⁶ Michael D. Cherniss, for example, argues that the poem is intended to be heroic rather than religious and that its heroic moral code would have been more meaningful to its audience than its theological stance. Cherniss.

⁸⁷ Pat Belanoff, "The Fall(?) of the Old English Female Poetic Image," *PMLA* 104, no. 5 (1989). In addition, Damico points out that shininess is a common characteristic of Valkyries throughout Germanic literature, both when the Valkyrie was understood as a goddess and when she was understood as a heroic woman. Helen Damico, "The Valkyrie Reflex in Old English Literature," in *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, ed. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

⁸⁸ Belanoff: 828.

Here the discourse of misogyny becomes relevant, for Eve's brightness is part of her physicality, the corporeality that marks women as lower than men and especially as lacking spirituality.⁸⁹ In this dualistic paradigm, "woman" is similar to those classes of dreams that are meaningless in medieval formulations, those that arise from the body.⁹⁰ Initially, Eve's corporality is harmless, even a blessing, but her failure to avoid the deception of the fiend taints her physical beauty, transforming it from innocent fairness to seductive allure; and her vision, expressed in such similar terms of radiance, takes on the sinister significance of a dream sent by evil spirits to deceive. Unlike Satan, who loses his radiance once he is confined to hell, after her disobedience and fall Eve does not lose her shimmering beauty. When Eve goes to Adam to convince him that he, too, should eat the fruit, she is still described as "*idese scenost,/wifa wlitigost'*(shiniest of women, most beautiful of women) (626-27). Eve's physical brightness and beauty are part of her link to Satan and bind the splendor of the dream-vision to both Satan and Eve. Just as woman's beauty is part of the seductive bodily power that makes her so dangerous to the spirituality of man; this dream-vision is powerful in part because of the deceptive brilliance that connects it to Eve, the body, and fiendish deception.

Another aspect of misogynistic discourse present in the poem associates women with excess of words, particularly with "the seductions and the ruses of speech."⁹¹ Bloch notes that, although this link predates the Christian era, it is most powerful in the anti-feminist and anti-marriage literature of the Middle Ages.⁹² In many depictions of the Fall, this familiar topos

⁸⁹ Influential thinkers from Aristotle in the fourth century B.C.E to Isidore of Seville in the early seventh century and beyond have explicitly linked woman to matter. See Blamires for many examples of this link in primary sources.

⁹⁰ Without the presence of the fiend to provide a supernatural explanation, in fact, Eve's vision, which immediately follows her tasting of the fruit, could conceivably be dismissed in dream theory as a *somnium naturale* or as one of Gregory's dreams arising simply from a full stomach.

⁹¹ Bloch, 14.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 15.

begins with Eve's attempt to convince Adam to eat the forbidden fruit; however, in *Genesis B* the verbal excesses and deceitfulness associated with women are joined to a particular type of speech, the dream report. Moreover, Eve's dream report is a textual demonstration of feminine verbal excess, as it significantly expands the much simpler narratorial report with elaborate and seductive description.

In addition, Bloch argues that patristic texts align the creation of Eve from Adam's side with the loss of literal speech and the "consequent necessity of interpretation."⁹³ Not only do early church fathers assert that this version of the creation is a metaphor intended to show that Eve is inferior to Adam, taken from his side rather than created directly by God, they also maintain that it is proof of her divine subordination to Adam because his creation occurred prior to hers. Bloch's point - that woman's creation signals a dualistic division and disunity in being and language, thus marring the unity that is Man and forcing division of proper meaning from figurative meaning - is well taken. However, the necessity of translation, interpretation, and glossing associated with the creation of woman overlaps here with the importance of interpretation to dream theory. While the highest forms of dreaming, such as the waking vision, *may* have obvious meaning, in order to be of value most significant dreams require interpretation to uncover their truth, and the interpreter rather than the dreamer is the figure of power and revelation. Indeed, Augustine asserts that "the man who interpreted what another had seen was more a prophet than the man who had seen."⁹⁴ Many of the best-known biblical dream-vision experiences involve the main (male) character interpreting a dream for another individual, thus revealing his special ability to tap into divine revelation. Joseph interpreting dreams for Pharaoh and his servants and Daniel interpreting dreams in Babylon are two noteworthy examples, and both Joseph and Daniel are the titular authors of medieval books on

⁹³ Ibid., 38.

⁹⁴ Augustine quoted in Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, 41.

dream interpretation.⁹⁵ Further, the first type of meaningful dream in Macrobius, the *somnium*, is an enigmatic dream requiring interpretation and would seem to have been considered a common experience of dreaming based on the considerable number of dream divination texts available throughout the Middle Ages.⁹⁶ Even the determination of whether a dream falls into a meaningful category or is simply a product of the body and daily activity is a form of dream interpretation.

As they are with regard to medieval texts in general, the power and right to translate the enigmata of dream-visions are generally masculine privileges. Dinshaw has examined the importance of gender construction on the theory and act of interpretation in the Middle Ages and argues that the act of “reading like a man” involves stripping the feminine text of its allegorical adornment in order to find its essential truth and meaning.⁹⁷ Beginning with the concept of the text gendered as female and the phallicization of writing, she asserts that “representation of the allegorical text as a veiled or clothed woman and the concomitant representation of various literary acts – reading, translating, glossing, creating a literary tradition – as masculine acts performed on this feminine body recur” throughout the medieval literary landscape.⁹⁸ Interpreting becomes a masculinized act of penetrating the metaphorical excess of verbiage associated with the creation of woman and the Fall of Man to reveal the transcendent truth beneath. As a masculine privilege, then, the burden of interpreting Eve’s dream-vision ought to fall to Adam, but here we find another problematic intersection of discourses at work in this text. Theoretical understandings of the translation of dreams as a largely masculine prerogative and

⁹⁵ Ibid., 9-10.

⁹⁶ Examples range from the many entries on dream divination in the Anglo-Saxon *Prognostics*, through the various types of medieval dreambooks described by Kruger in *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, to Thomas Hill’s sixteenth-century *The moste pleasaunte Arte of the Interpretation of Dreames*.

⁹⁷ Dinshaw, 17.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

the translation of woman as text or text as woman complicate one another. From the perspective of dream interpretation, Eve's successful use of a dream-vision report to persuade Adam to eat the fruit should have been circumvented by Adam's proper translation of the dream-vision she relates.

As pre-lapsarian man, Adam possesses a spiritual purity that should give him the perspicacity to detect falseness in the vision, much as he earlier detected the falseness of the fiend and Satan's message when they were presented to him directly. Eve's dream, though, is never interpreted by anyone. The nearest approach to interpretation, in fact, is Eve's contention that the dream must have come from God since she cannot imagine anyone else who could have sent it. Even the narrator, who is quick to editorialize at many points, does not offer an interpretation for the dream, but as a woman Eve is subject to numerous interpretations or glosses by the narrator.⁹⁹ Although he continuously praises her physical beauty and asserts that she has a loyal heart, he attributes her failure to interpret the vision correctly and to recognize the deceiver for what he was to the weakness of her mind: "*hæfde hire wacran hige / metod gemearcod*" (God had marked her with a weaker mind) (590-91). The narrator, then, translates Eve for the reader as beautiful and sincere but not very intelligent. In the language of medieval dream discourse, we might see that for his failure to translate Eve's dream report, Adam can be

⁹⁹ In fact, the narrator openly questions why God would have allowed Eve to be so deceived and mankind to be ruined by Satan's ruse: *þæt is micel wundor / þæt hit ece god æfre wolde, / þeoden, þolian þæt wurde þegn swa monig / forlædd be þam lygenum þe for þam larum com* (It is a great wonder that the eternal God and ruler was willing to endure that so many thanes be deceived with lies by the one who brought those suggestions.) (595-98). Doane's commentary on these lines includes a number of plausible variants on their translation, and I translate "*þolian*" as "endure" based on his reading of the line. S. A. J. Bradley's translation of *þolian* as "tolerate" also informs my reading here. Each translation maintains the narrator's sense of awe or incredulity regarding sin's entry into the world through the devil's deception of Eve. Doane, ed., 287-88; "Genesis," in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, ed. S. A. J. Bradley (London: Everyman's Library, 1982).

blamed for the Fall and Eve can be at least partially exculpated; however in the discourse of misogyny (in which women, rather than dreams, are the objects of interpretation) we might see Eve's guilt resting once again on her excesses of body and speech and her lack of mind or spirit.

These various cultural discourses with their range of implications for gender dynamics merge in *Genesis B* to produce a text that ultimately, even if imperfectly, reinforces medieval anti-feminism. By including a dream-vision for Eve in the story, *Genesis B* draws on anxieties present in medieval dream-vision theories to explain and accentuate the treachery and deceit that lead to the Fall. In so doing the text supports the association of women's reports of their dreams and visions with deception and destruction.

2.3 Pilate's Wife

Blaming the ills of mankind on woman does not, of course, end with Eve; instead this blame is passed on to all women as her daughters. Even when Eve herself is not a character in masculine texts including a woman's dream, the integration of misogyny with deceptive dreaming continues. Rather than adding a dream to a biblical narrative, authors of texts portraying the dream of Pilate's wife were able to show that the only woman's dream actually found in the Bible was a diabolical attempt to frustrate God's plan for redeeming the fallen world.¹⁰⁰ In the most basic version of this dream from Matthew 27:19, Pilate receives a warning from his wife regarding the trial of Jesus: "And as he was sitting in the place of judgment, his wife sent to him, saying: Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many

¹⁰⁰ Gardner Campbell, "The Figure of Pilate's Wife in Amelia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaerum*," in *Renaissance Papers 1995*, ed. George Walton Williams and Barbara J. Baines (Raleigh, North Carolina: The Southeastern Renaissance Conference, 1996). I am indebted to Gardner Campbell not only for his fine scholarship but also for his encouragement and generosity in directing me to other resources.

things this day in a dream because of him."¹⁰¹ This single reference to Pilate's wife's dream report (for which, incidentally, her husband seems to have had little use) bloomed in apocryphal works into a fairly full biography of the woman and variously interpreted versions of the event. Given the name Procla, Procula, or Claudia Procula, along with other variations, Pilate's wife appears in a number of apocryphal texts in which she is most often characterized as an early convert to Christianity.¹⁰² Canonized along with her husband in the Coptic Church and alone in the Greek Church, this woman and her dream are represented in a decidedly more negative light in medieval English portrayals, where Pilate's wife is generally characterized as either the dupe of Satan, who deceives her into trying to stop the work of redemption in the form of Christ's crucifixion, or Satan's willing associate, eager to participate in an attempt to thwart God's will by reporting her dream to her husband.¹⁰³ In the poetic text known as *The Northern*

¹⁰¹ "sedente autem illo pro tribunali misit ad illum uxor eius dicens nihil tibi et iusto illi multa enim passa sum hodie per visum propter eum" The translation is from the Douay-Rheims Bible. Although Psalters and metrical adaptations of Biblical material were available in French and Middle English, vernacular translations of this particular portion of the New Testament post-dating the Old English Matthew (*He sæt þa pilatus on his domsetle þa sende his wif to hym & cwæð, ne beo þe nan þing gemæne ongen þisne rihtwisan; Soðlice fela ic hæbbe gepolod todæg þurh gesyhðe for hym*) were not available until Wyclif's New Testament was completed around 1380. Fredric G. Kenyon, "Middle English Versions before Wyclif," in *Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. James Hastings (New York: Scribner, 1963).

¹⁰² The most prominent of these texts, which appears in both Old English and Middle English translations, is *The Acts of Pilate*, also known as the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. In this text Pilate and his wife are portrayed as sympathetic to Jesus and distressed by his death. "The Gospel of Nicodemus, or Acts of Pilate," in *The Apocryphal New Testament*, ed. M. R. James (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924).

¹⁰³ *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in Literature*, s.v. "Pilate's Wife." See also Edith Deen, *All of the Women of the Bible* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1955). Nicholas of Lyra's well-known and highly respected fourteenth-century commentary on Matthew suggests that the dream could have been a diabolical attempt to have Christ released. Nicholas of Lyra, *Postilla Super Totam Bibliam*, 4 vols. (Frankfurt: Minerva GmbH, 1971; reprint, Reprint of the 1492 Strassburg edition).

Passion, for example, Pilate's wife is approached by Satan in her dream with warnings that if Pilate does not release Jesus he and all those involved in the death will be "shent," or brought to ruin.¹⁰⁴ When she takes this message to Pilate, she asserts that it has come from an "angell full greuose and grim," information that might lead us to assume that she has been deceived and is passing the deception on in good faith (1097). However, this reading is complicated by her assurance to Pilate that she "wate full wele" that it was actually a "fende" who menaced her with his threats "ffor ihesu sake" (1100, 1098f).¹⁰⁵

The deception here is quite complex, for the fiend is certainly telling the truth when he warns that those who harm Jesus are doing so wrongly and at their own peril; he is, as the devil points out, innocent of the charges on which he is being held and, as understood by the poem's medieval Christian audience, the victim of an evil Jewish plot for which they and those who helped would likely be damned. However, because Christ's death would bring the salvation of mankind and because the poem's audience knows that Satan's desire is to foil this outcome, this manipulation by the fiend remains a deception because he does not reveal his true motives to Pilate's wife. Therefore, in passing along the fiend's message, Pilate's wife is part of a chain of deception intended to frustrate God's purpose. Her recognition of the message as the work of a devil adds to her guilt, but it is difficult to determine whether she ought to be read as merely

¹⁰⁴ *The Northern Passion: Four Parallel Texts and the French Original, with Specimens of Additional Manuscripts*, ed. Frances A. Foster, 3 vols. (London: Early English Text Society, 1913), 1080. This poem's beginning is a translation of a French original, but as the text progresses it becomes a more or less original adaptation of the events of the passion of Christ, including episodes not found in the French source. My references will be given by line number in the Harleian version included in this edition unless otherwise noted.

¹⁰⁵ I have read "ffor ihesus sake" to mean that the fiend has acted in order to save Jesus, ie. for Jesus's well-being. The phrase might also be read as an oath, however, and thus open an interesting question regarding the use of crucifixion language and chronicity in the plays. Unfortunately, I am unable to justice to this topic at this time.

Satan's deluded puppet or as an active participant in the attempt to manipulate Pilate into releasing Jesus unharmed. In either case, however, Pilate's wife is associated with devilish deception through her dream.

The complexity of this deception, moreover, may serve to link it more closely to the complicated deception practiced on Eve in the garden, where the serpent assures her that in spite of God's warning she and Adam would not "die the death" if they ate of the forbidden fruit.¹⁰⁶ While the audience of the biblical text would understand that the Fall does, indeed, usher mortality and spiritual death into the world, the immediate physical death that God's warning seems to imply is, in fact, not forthcoming when Adam and Eve eat the fruit. The serpent can be understood to be manipulating Eve with a sort of truthful lie in the same way that we see Satan manipulating Pilate's wife in *The Northern Passion's* account of Matthew 27:19. Both Eve and Pilate's wife are anti-feminist depictions of woman as the agent or means of deception; however, in *The Northern Passion* this anti-feminism is coupled with an apprehensive sense of the deceptive potential of sleeping dreams rather than waking visions. Satan's use of Pilate's wife *and* a dream to accomplish his purpose both supports and is reinforced by two cooperating cultural languages: the misogynistic discourse of women as deceived and deceptive daughters of Eve and the anxiety-ridden discourse regarding the nature of dreams.

Similarly, the N-Town play "Satan and Pilate's Wife; Second Trial before Pilate" portrays Pilate's wife as Satan's choice of instrument to prevent the foreseen harrowing of hell that will follow Christ's death. Begged by one of his demons "That nevyr in helle we may hym se," Satan determines that he will save "Jhesus lyf" by giving Pilate's wife a deceptive dream:¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ "*dixit autem serpens ad mulierem nequaquam morte moriemini*" Genesis 3:4.

¹⁰⁷ 39 and 47. All references to this play are from "Play Thirty-One, Satan and Pilate's Wife; Second Trial before Pilate," in *The N-Town Plays*, ed. Douglas Sugano (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007). All further references will be given parenthetically by line number.

To Pylatys wyff I wele now go,
And sche is aslepe, abed ful fast.
And byd her withowtyn wordys mo
To Pylat that sche send in hast.
I shal asay, and this wol be,
To bring Pylat in belef. (50-55)

Notably, Satan here is less concerned with deceiving Pilate's wife, to whom he apparently intends to speak very directly, than with deceiving Pilate, and when Pilate's wife reports her dream, she correctly identifies its source:

A fend aperyd me befor
As I lay in my bed slepyng fast.
Sethyn the tyme that I was born
Was I nevyr so sore agast!

As wylde fyre and thondyr blast,
He cam cryeng onto me.
He seyde, "Thei that bete Jhesus or bownd hym fast —
Withowtyn end dampnyd shal be!"

Therefore, a wey herein thu se
And lete Jhesu from thee clere pace.
The Jewys, thei wole begyle thee
And put on thee all the trespace. (62-73)

Knowing that this dream message has been brought to her by a devil, Pilate's wife nevertheless passes it on to him as truth, along with a warning not to allow the Jews to "begyle" him. Deception is clearly a part of the dream and the message, but just who is deceiving whom becomes somewhat problematic. The stage directions suggest that Pilate's wife is disturbed by the dream, reacting to it with a "rewly (pitiable) noyse," and that she wakes and runs to speak to Pilate "leke (like) a mad woman." It is easy to imagine such a reaction to a frightening, threatening dream brought by Satan, but like her counterpart in *The Northern Passion*, this Pilate's wife recognizes the message as that of a fiend without openly questioning its veracity. Seeming to believe the warning in the dream regardless of, or perhaps because of, the nature of its source, she passes it on to her husband, thus becoming a conduit for Satan's attempt to deceive Pilate into sparing Jesus's life and averting the crucifixion that will bring his own downfall. Like Eve, Pilate's wife knowingly brings Satan's message and will to her husband with

the intent of having him follow it. Once again, the woman and the dream are both agents of diabolical deception.

Among the mystery plays, "Christ before Pilate I: The Dream of Pilate's Wife" from the York cycle offers a singularly striking example of the imbrication of the discourses of dreaming and misogyny. Here we are given a representation of Pilate's wife as deceived dreamer, but we are also given more insight than the other plays offer into her character and, specifically, her function as a garrulous, sensuous, and blatantly corporeal anti-feminist stereotype. In her first appearance in the play, Percula (a variant spelling of Procula) engages Pilate in sexual banter in which she calls attention to herself as both wise and beautiful:

I am dame precious Percula, of prynces the prise,
Wiffe to ser Pilate here, prince withouten pere.
All welle of all womanhede I am, wittie and wise,
Consayue nowe my countenance so comely and clere.
The coloure of my corse is full clere
And in richesse of robis I am rayed,
There is no lorde in this londe as I lere,
In faith, that hath a frendlyar feere,
Than yhe my lorde, myselffe thof I saye itt.¹⁰⁸

Although she attempts to make a positive point about her cerebral qualities when introducing herself, Percula focuses more lines on her physical attributes, including her lavish clothing, than on her intellectual prowess. Her protestations of wisdom and wit, moreover, appear to reveal more about her personal vanity than they do about her actual acumen. Pilate's response is what medieval culture would no doubt expect it to be; for after agreeing that no other lord has a better companion, he shifts his focus to her sexual allure, demanding a kiss and praising her lips because they are "In bed . . . full buxhom and bayne" (52). Percula's body and sexual desirability become the focus of her portrayal, just as corporality and sensuality are primary

¹⁰⁸ 37- 45. All references to this play are from "York Play Thirty: The Tapiters' and Couchers' Play: Christ before Pilate I: The Dream of Pilate's Wife," in *The York Plays*, ed. Richard Beadle (London: E. Arnold, 1982). I am indebted to the University of Virginia Electronic Text Center for online access to this text. All further references will be given parenthetically by line number.

attributes in dualistic formulations of women in the Middle Ages. Firmly established as vain, flirtatious, and distinctly corporeal, Percula also demonstrates the anti-feminist association of women with excess of words, speaking many more lines than her counterparts in other versions of this event. As she embodies each aspect of misogynistic discourse in this masculine text, Pilate's wife becomes the perfect vessel for a diabolical dream.

Not long after Percula's interaction with Pilate is ended, the devil begins a diatribe against the work of salvation soon to be accomplished by Christ. He determines that he will attempt to frustrate God's will by speaking to Pilate's wife in her sleep, providing her with a dream that he hopes she will use to influence Pilate to release Jesus. Threatening Percula with the loss of all their power and wealth, the demon frightens the woman, but he also appeals to her as "wise and ware," capitalizing on the vanity regarding her wisdom that she revealed in her earlier speech (167).¹⁰⁹ Percula immediately awakens and sends a servant to Pilate with this message:

All naked this nyght as I napped
With tene and with trayne was I trapped
With a sweven that swiftly me swapped
Of one Jesu, the juste man the Jewes will undoo.
She prayes tente to that trewe man, with tyne be noyot trapped. (186-90)

This speech seems to indicate that the dream does, in fact, deceive Percula and lead to her innocent attempt to stop her husband from making a terrible mistake. Nevertheless, she recognizes that the dream somehow incorporates the concept of treachery or betrayal because she indicates that it included both "tene" and "trayne."¹¹⁰ Further, in these few lines we see the

¹⁰⁹ For a more detailed discussion of this point, see Campbell, 7.

¹¹⁰ In a personal communication through Chaucernet on November 4, 2008, John McLaughlin suggests that Percula mentions betrayal here from the point of view of "the wicked," who would see themselves as betrayed by the death of Christ and the "ultimate good." In the same discussion thread Brian S. Lee argues that in this case "trayne," merely alliterative with "tene," only indicates that the dream was troubling. The Middle English Dictionary, however, indicates that this word is most commonly associated with

languages of woman as body, deceptive dreaming, and woman deceived come together. Putting aside its alliterative utility, Percula's reference to her nakedness at the beginning of her message seems unnecessary except as a means of emphasizing that as a woman she is primarily body, aligned with things earthy, and lacking in spiritual discernment, just as her earlier description of herself as "in riches of robes . . . rayed" highlighted her physicality and adornment.¹¹¹ While the rich clothing she wears in her garrulous first appearance may be a physical representation of the adornment and verbal excess associated with women and the need for masculine translation, nakedness specifically emphasizes the unfortunate vulnerability of her gender, the sense that like Eve all women are particularly defenseless before the manipulative lies of Satan.¹¹² In addition, because this York cycle version of Pilate's wife is especially verbose, bantering with Pilate and verbally resisting his minister's insistence that she go home where women belong, she fits the stereotype of the jangling woman whose verbal excess annoys and endangers men. Indeed, Pilate's attraction to Percula's beautiful appearance and charming speech nearly causes him to forget the laws of the land that require her to go home before nightfall. Seductive both physically and verbally, Pilate's wife is a true daughter of Eve according to the medieval misogynistic cultural code. Added to this anti-feminist discourse, we see the discourses of deceptive dreaming and woman deceived. Her "sweven" appears meaningful and truth-bearing to Percula, but the audience sees and hears the devil as

treachery and subterfuge if not outright betrayal. Chaucer net discussions are archived at <http://listserv.uic.edu/archives/chaucer.html>.

¹¹¹ Nakedness need not indicate complete nudity in the Middle Ages, as it does not always indicate that today. It can indicate that the body is scantily clothed or wearing a single under garment. However, in any of its possible medieval meanings nakedness includes an underlying sense of defenselessness. See the Middle English Dictionary for specific uses of this term in the Middle Ages.

¹¹² Likewise, Satan's appeal to Percula's wisdom and wit partially mirrors the deception of Eve in Paradise, where the serpent encourages the woman to augment her wisdom and knowledge by eating of the forbidden fruit so that she can be like God.

he plants his lies in her mind. Unable to distinguish truth from lies, and in spite of her admiration for her own wit and wisdom, this naked woman, like her first mother, is deceived by Satan, and that deception comes in the form of a dream designed to “begile and deceyue.”¹¹³

In each of these versions of the dream of Pilate’s wife, we see intersections of the cultural codes of misogyny and dream theory at work. Their combination in these texts is relatively seamless in the sense that the two discourses cooperate to produce a fairly uncomplicated anti-feminist message. However, the necessity of following the biblical version of events so that salvation history is not substantively altered opens a gap in the apparent monovocal effect on their surfaces. This gap can be detected in the complete lack of power Pilate’s wife and Satan’s deception ultimately wield in the various versions of the story. The biblical account asserts that Pilate was already aware that Jesus had been brought before him unjustly, yet he fails even to acknowledge the message from his wife regarding her dream and proceeds with the release of Barabbas rather than Jesus.¹¹⁴ In the various Middle English texts, however, Pilate responds to the dream with varying degrees of concern, but always ends up (as, of course, he must) allowing the crucifixion to continue.¹¹⁵ Therefore, in terms of medieval stereotypes of deceitful femininity, Pilate’s wife is singularly ineffective. Here the Bible story itself inserts language into this complex of discourses that subtly disturbs the anti-feminist message. If the cooperating discourses of dream theory and misogyny that warn of the dangers of deceptive dreaming and the daughters of Eve are correct, then the failure of the dream of Pilate’s wife is almost unthinkable. Nevertheless, fail it does, and fail it must. Neither the wily woman nor the demonic dream succeeds in altering Pilate’s plan to hand Jesus over to the

¹¹³ See note 72 above.

¹¹⁴ See Matthew 27:15 – 26.

¹¹⁵ In *The Northern Passion* and “York Play Thirty,” Pilate discusses the dream with Jesus’s accusers but is quickly convinced to ignore it. In “N-Town Play Thirty-one” he basically dismisses the dream and tells his wife to go back to bed.

Jews for crucifixion, and both woman and dream are less threatening than the discourses at work here would seem to allow. Consequently, the dream of Pilate's wife, while not a pro-feminist representation, quietly subverts the anti-feminism rising from the combination of dream theory and patristic characterizations of women. Overall, each of these versions of the dream of Pilate's wife tends to sustain medieval anxieties about female mendacity and the deceptive potential of dreams because in each one a fiend is able to manipulate and control a woman by giving her a diabolical dream. However, because this devilish control of the woman is rendered harmless to the telos of salvation history in these texts, on at least this one level they also complicate the anti-feminism they seem to support.

2.4 Chaucer's Dreaming Women

The heteroglossia surrounding women, deception, and dreaming in the Middle Ages is not limited to the realm of religiously inspired literature, for most of Chaucer's women dreamers also demonstrate a complex interaction between misogynistic discourse and theories of deceptive dreaming.¹¹⁶ This interaction operates in ways different from that we have seen in *Genesis B*, *The Northern Passion* and the mystery plays. While the same complex of cultural codes manifests itself in these texts, it does not make a complete circuit in which the woman dreams, is deceived, and becomes a deceiver, and the diabolical element is almost entirely missing. Instead, most of Chaucer's women dreamers are associated with deception by a person, a dream, or both, but do not deceive anyone else. The deceiver whose falseness leads to the woman's dream is, in fact, often a man rather than a devil, and here we note a sharp

¹¹⁶ I do not intend a claim here that Chaucer was consciously misogynistic. Questions of the author's personal attitude toward women in general are beyond the scope of this project. However, I do believe that many of Chaucer's texts depicting women as dreamers are operating through the same complex of cultural codes as those of the other texts under examination. Only the dream of Alcyone in *The Book of the Duchess* fails to employ the same anti-feminist discourse, and the complete lack of deceitful associations in her dream may be partly attributable to the general tendency of the poem to idealize women and love.

contrast with the pattern established in our previous examples. Whoever the deceiver is, however, even in Chaucer the dream or vision experienced by the deceived woman is connected to the deception; therefore, the woman's dream is misleading rather than revelatory. "Anelida and Arcite" includes one of Chaucer's earliest portrayals of a dreaming woman, Anelida who is deceived and betrayed by "fals Arcite."¹¹⁷ Anelida describes her dreams of the lover who has left her in a complaint:

And yf I slepe a furlong wey or tweye,
Then thynketh me that your figure
Before me stont, clad in asure,
To profren eft and newe assure
For to be trewe, and merci me to preye. (328 – 32)

The cruel Arcite, of course, has taken advantage of Anelida's love and generosity only to betray her with another woman; thus, her dream of his return is false. Although Anelida is not deceived by the false dream of Arcite's return and contrition, she is a deceived lover who receives a false dream and thus manifests the link between women, deception, and dreaming that we have already seen in other masculine texts.

Canacee from the Squire's tale and Custance from the Man of Law's tale also dream; and although here the association of dreaming with deception is more subtle than what we have seen so far, it is nonetheless present. Canacee's connection to deception and dreaming is indirect. The recipient of two gifts, a magic mirror that

Hath swich a myght that men may in it see
Whan ther shal fallen any adversitee
. . .
And over al this, if any lady bright
Hath set hire herte on any maner wight,
If he be fals, she shal his tresoun see

and a ring that allows her to understand the speech of birds, Canacee retires early, "And in hire sleep, right for impressioun / Of hire mirour, she had a visioun" (133-34, 137-39, 371-72). The

¹¹⁷ Geoffrey Chaucer, "Anelida and Arcite," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), 11. All references to Chaucer's works are from *The Riverside Chaucer*. Henceforward citations from Chaucer will be given parenthetically by line number.

next day with the help of her ring, Canacee hears the sad tale of the falcon that has been deserted by her lover the tercelet. Canacee is not deceived by a lover, but her dream is brought on by a mirror that reveals the falseness of men to women, and she is intimately associated with the abandoned falcon's tale that so resembles Anelida's tragic story. A more dramatic connection between women's dreams and deception occurs in the Man of Law's Tale, where Custance is the victim of her mother-in-law's deceptive machinations. As the "feendlych" and "mannish" Donegild tricks her son and his constable with forged letters, the Man of Law laments to Custance, "wel may thy goost have feere, / and slepyng, in thy dreem been in penance" (782-83, 803-04). Donegild's association with deception is multi-layered and disturbing. She not only deceives her son and his messengers with an appearance of innocent concern, but also forges letters, thus highlighting the uncertain nature of truth in texts. Perhaps most disturbing of all, her feminine appearance hides a masculinity of character that, far from adding to her virtue, represents a desire to rule over men rather than to submit to the natural "thralldom and penance" that is her womanly lot in life (286). In this way Donegild mirrors both the evil Sowdanesse as well as Eve, the original woman who would not be ruled by man or God. While Custance is not a typical deceived woman, she is the victim of deception by a fiendish character subtly linked to the guilt of Eve, and it is this deception with which her dream is paired. In each of these cases, dreaming and women are subtly and inventively joined to the concepts of betrayal and deception.

Neither Anelida, nor Canacee, nor Custance, however, is quite as iconic a deceived woman as Dido, and Dido is the first of Chaucer's woman dreamers whose dream report may also indicate that she too is a deceiver. The account of Dido in *The Legend of Good Women* relies heavily on both Virgil and Ovid's versions of her story, and Chaucer takes few liberties with these classical texts in his portrayal. In Virgil, though not in Ovid, Dido has two dreams; therefore, Chaucer's inclusion of a dream report for her in *The Legend of Good Women* is not

original. However, Dido's dream report in Chaucer's text carries a hint of deception that is not found in *The Aeneid*.¹¹⁸

Virgil's first depiction of Dido dreaming occurs early in Book 4 when, after hearing Aeneas's tale of his adventures, the queen finds herself irresistibly drawn to the stranger. The next morning she tells her sister that "quandaries and dreams / Have come to frighten [. . . her] – such dreams!"¹¹⁹ Virgil reveals that, as she experiences these dreams, Dido is "far gone and ill," but there is no indication that the dreams are deceptive or that Dido is reporting them to deceive (4.9). As her love affair with Aeneas comes to an end, Dido is again reported to experience dreams. This time "In nightmare, fevered, she was hunted down / By pitiless Aeneas, and she seemed / Deserted always" (4.619-21). Virgil's versions of Dido's dreams clearly place them in the meaningless category of the *insomnium*, and his association of them with the deceived woman seems far more incidental than does Chaucer's adaptation of this association.

In *The Legend of Good Women*, Chaucer compresses the events of the first four books of *The Aeneid* into 444 lines focused almost entirely on how those events lead to the betrayal and death of the loving and faithful Dido. Chaucer's debt to Ovid's version of the story in *The Heroides* is well-documented, but in the case of Dido's dream he adds his own sense to that of both of his sources. Just as in *The Aeneid*, after hearing Aeneas's story Chaucer's Dido is overcome with desire for the Trojan exile and becomes "sick" with love: "That sely Dido hath now swich desyr / With Eneas , hire newe gest, to dele, / that she hath lost hire hewe and ek hire hele" (1157-59). Chaucer's narrator adds a description of Dido's restless night, revealing

¹¹⁸ Dido, of course, also appears in *The House of Fame*, but no dream report is included in that account of her victimization by Aeneas.

¹¹⁹ Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Vintage Books, a division of Random House, Inc., 1990), 4.11-12. All quotes from *The Aeneid* will be taken from this edition and will henceforth be cited parenthetically by book and line number in the text.

details supplied by neither Virgil nor Ovid that she “waketh, waleth, maketh many a breyd, / As don these lovers” (1166-67). He does not, however, say that she dreams. Nevertheless, Dido’s next speech to her sister Anne indicates that instead of tossing, wailing, and crying through a sleepless night, she has experienced a dream of great importance: “Now, dere sister myn, what may it be / That me agasteth in my drem?’ quod she” (1170-71). Dido claims that her dream has shocked and upset her and implies that it requires some interpretation when she wonders “what may it be.” Dido follows this dream report and request for understanding with assertions of her love for Aeneas and her intent to marry him:

This ilke Troyan is so in my thoght,
For that me thinketh he is so wel y-wroght,
And eek so lykly for to be a man,
And therwithal so mikel good he can,
That al my love and lyf lyth in his cure.
Have ye not herd him telle his aventure?
Now certes, Anne, if that ye rede hit me,
I wolde fain to him y-wedded be. (1172-80)

By prefacing this declaration with the report of a disturbing dream that demands interpretation, Dido seems to attempt to hide the embarrassment of her sudden, inordinate, and possibly disloyal love for Aeneas and to authorize her desire to marry him through the authority of a significant dream.

It can certainly, and rightly, be argued that Chaucer includes Dido’s dream report because it appears in his source or perhaps that he includes it for the same “psychological” effect that Virgil’s reports of Dido’s *insomnia* produce. However, the narrative exclusion of a dream from Chaucer’s preceding account of the details of Dido’s love-sick night suggests that she may have invented this story of a dream, that she is using the excuse of a dream in a deceptive attempt to gain Anne’s approval for her romance with Aeneas. Moreover, as she implies that her dream is a *somnium*, a significant dream requiring interpretation, Dido’s subsequent declaration seems to interpret her dream as authorization of her love for and marriage to Aeneas. Whether Dido’s dream report is a lie or not, such an interpretation is at best misleading and is at worst an exercise in tragic self-deceit. Although both Chaucer’s source

and his own work can be understood to associate, however loosely, this deceived woman with a dream report, Chaucer also manages to include a hint of intentional deception in the form of a false dream report and a possibly faulty or deceptive interpretation of that dream. While Chaucer's narrative is blatantly sympathetic to Dido, the discourse of deceptive dreaming still manages to find its way into the story of the deceived woman. Thus, Chaucer's Dido, like other women dreamers, can be read either as a woman deceived by a dream or as a woman using a dream report to deceive. In either case, the complex anti-feminist relationship between woman, deception, and dreaming is maintained.

Troilus and Criseyde offers another example of Chaucer's use of the languages of dream theory and misogyny, and just as a commitment to a sympathetic portrayal of Dido does not preclude her association with deceptive dreaming, any apparent sympathy that the narrator shows for Criseyde does not spare her from this same association. Although only Criseyde's second dream has received intense critical attention, both of her dream experiences can be understood to be at least partially deceptive. In her first dream report Criseyde tells Pandarus that she has dreamed three times in one night of his coming to see her (2.89-91), and in her second dream she is attacked by an eagle who takes her heart and replaces it with his own:

And as she slep, anonright tho hire mette
How that an egle, fethered whit as bon,
Under hire brest his longe clawes sette,
And out hire herte he rente, and that anon,
And dide his herte into hire brest to gon –
Of which she nought agroos, ne nothyng smerte –
And forth he fleigh, with herte left for herte. (2.925-31)

Unlike the dream of Pilate's wife, found in the Bible and many other sources, and unlike Dido's dream, for which *The Aeneid* is a direct and barely altered source, Criseyde's dreams are original with Chaucer and appear to serve both narratological and psychological purposes.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Constance B. Heatt discusses Chaucer's division of Triolo's dream of the boar physically tearing out Criseyde's heart into the two dreams of Troilus and Criseyde. Boccaccio's *Filostrato* certainly supplied material for Criseyde's dream of the eagle, but Chaucer has done something entirely unique with what he

Many critics, focusing only on the second dream, emphasize its foreshadowing Criseyde's yielding to both Troilus and Diomedes.¹²¹ Analysis of the dream's prophetic nature within the narrative, the aspect most important to an understanding of it in light of medieval dream theory, varies little from critic to critic, and Criseyde's earlier dream report is, for the most part, ignored by scholars.¹²² Each of these dreams, however, is significant according to medieval dream theory, and I argue that each also demonstrates the medieval association of deceptive dreaming and deceitful femininity.

The lack of critical attention paid to Criseyde's first dream report is a bit surprising given that it constitutes Criseyde's first meaningful speech in the narrative. As Pandarus first approaches his niece in Book II with the intention of beginning his ill-fated machinations, Criseyde greets him and then tells him of her dream:

found in Boccaccio. I argue that this distinctive adaptation constitutes originality. Constance B. Hieatt, "The Dreams of Troilus, Criseyde, and Chaucer; Chaucer's Manipulation of the Categories of Macrobius Et. Al.," *English Studies in Canada* 14, no. 4 (1988): 407.

¹²¹ Helen S. Corsa, "Dreams in Troilus and Criseyde," *American Imago: A Psychoanalytic Journal for Culture, Science, and the Arts* 27 (1970); Allen J. Frantzen, "Troilus and Criseyde: The Poem and the Frame," (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993); Joseph E. Gallagher, "Criseyde's Dream of the Eagle: Love and War in Troilus and Criseyde," *Modern Language Quarterly* 36 (1975); Sue Hum, "Knowledge, Belief, and Lack of Agency: The Dreams of Geoffrey, Troilus, Criseyde, and Chaucer," *Style* 31, no. 3 (1997); Molly Murray, "The Value Of 'Eschaunge': Ransom and Substitution in Troilus and Criseyde," *ELH* 69, no. 2 (2002); Valerie Ross, "Believing Cassandra: Intertextual Politics and the Interpretation of Dreams in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *The Chaucer Review* 31, no. 4 (1997). For various views on Criseyde's dream see Victoria Warren, "(Mis)Reading The 'Text' Of Criseyde: Context and Identity in Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde," *The Chaucer Review* 36, no. 1 (2001).

¹²² The dearth of attention to Criseyde's first dream noted by Allen Frantzen more than twenty years ago has not substantially changed. Allen J. Frantzen, "The 'Joie and Tene' of Dreams in *Troilus and Criseyde*," in *Chaucer in the Eighties*, ed. Julian N. Wasserman and Robert J. Blanch (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 105, 108.

“Ey, uncle myn, welcome iwys,” quod she;
And up she roos, and by the hond in hye
She took hym faste, and seyde, “This nyght thrie,
To goode mot it turne, of yow I mette.” (87-90)

The reader, well aware from the first line that this is a tale of “double sorwe,” can immediately grasp the irony in Criseyde’s hope that the dreams she has had of Pandarus bode well. Chaucer does not elaborate on the content of the dreams, rendering moot their exact classification under medieval dream theory, but the implication seems to be that they have been in some way prophetic in the manner of a *visio* in Macrobius’s scheme. Criseyde’s desire, of course, is to interpret these dreams as prophecies of a good outcome of Pandarus’s visit to her, and for a time after she and Troilus begin their relationship such would seem to be the case. However, after she is traded to the Greeks and has chosen to give herself to Diomedes, Criseyde recognizes the evil that has come her way and will follow her “unto the worlds ende” (5.1058). Whether the dreams themselves have deceived Criseyde or whether she has misled herself in their interpretation, the good she hopes they signify is, in fact, a deception.

Similarly, Criseyde’s dream of the eagle appears to suggest that if she gives her heart to Troilus and takes his in return, she will experience neither fear nor pain, but this is not the case.¹²³ Although the sorrow and regret that accompany Criseyde’s transfer from Ilium to the Greek camp and from Troilus to Diomedes are long delayed, they are the inescapable outcome of her surrender to Troilus’s affections. Had she never allowed herself to love Troilus and be loved in return, in fact, we might imagine the prospect of a reunion with her father to hold a certain amount of pleasure for Criseyde, even if it were the result of a prisoner exchange. Criseyde’s second dream, a *somnium*, or enigmatic dream according to Macrobian theory, requires proper interpretation to reveal its meaning, and one might argue that in spite of the grisly nature of the dream’s events Criseyde is unable or unwilling to interpret it as signifying a

¹²³ Mary Behrman notes that this dream is often interpreted as “foreshadowing Troilus’s sexual aggression,” but she argues that it is “signifying a healthy sexual relationship in which the two lovers’ identities merge” (323). Mary Behrman, “Heroic Criseyde,” *The Chaucer Review* 38, no. 4 (2004).

dire ending to her romance. My claim that this, too, is a deceptive dream that leads both Criseyde and Troilus to ruin is strengthened by the general agreement among critics that this dream does indeed indicate exactly what Criseyde believes it does, a relationship from which she need not shrink as it will cause her neither fear nor pain. If her dream of the eagle signifies a painless love affair, it is yet another misleading truth.

Both of Criseyde's deceptive dreams are experienced, of course, by the woman whose name is nearly synonymous with betrayal, deception, and faithlessness. Chaucer emphasizes Criseyde's faithlessness through *occupatio* on several occasions. In Book 5, for example, soon after Criseyde has lamented the fact that she will live on in infamy for her betrayal of Troilus, the narrator reiterates her guilt and disgrace:

Ne me ne list this sely womman chide
Forther than the storye wol devyse.
Hire name, allas is publysshed so wide
That for hire gilt it oughte ynough to suffise. (1093 – 96)

Although she has promised to return to Troilus, Criseyde has proven to be a traitor and deceiver. No matter how sympathetic or mocking one takes the narrator's view of her to be, Criseyde is guilty of many of the accusations made against all women in the discourse of misogyny, and Chaucer's inclusion of two deceptive dreams for her more powerfully demonstrates the association of women, dreams, and deception found than do "Anelida and Arcite," the Squire's tale, the Man of Law's tale, and *The Legend of Good Women*.

The only detectible complication to Chaucer's fusion of dream theory and misogyny in these texts lies in the sympathetic attitude they seem to express toward the women. In their traditional characterizations Dido and Criseyde occupy opposite ends of the spectrum of deceit; Dido is the faithful, tragic victim of Aeneas's deception, while Criseyde is the faithless lover of Troilus who personifies feminine perfidy. In Chaucer's texts, though, even Criseyde is a generally sympathetic character in whom readers recognize good qualities and complex motivations. Nevertheless, at the intersection of dream theory and misogyny, the two are quite similar, for neither is nor can be the recipient of a truth-bearing, revelatory, or transformative

dream such as a man might have.¹²⁴ For each, dreaming is an opening to deception and, ultimately, calamity. Chaucer's women dreamers live out the impasse for women posed by the fusion of these two discourses: misogyny perpetually associates women with the body rather than the spirit; therefore medieval dream theory dictates that women are incapable of true meaningful dreams and visions. It is only by way of deception that these daughters of Eve can have access to significant dreaming. The undeniable sensitivity and subtlety of Chaucer's association of dreaming and deception along with his narrator's apparent sympathy for each of these women, but especially for Criseyde, softens but does not eliminate his integration of dream theory with misogyny in these works.

The Wife of Bath, certainly Chaucer's most famous woman character, provides a decidedly different example of Chaucer's integration of dream theory and misogyny, one that has far more in common with traditional anti-feminism than the five already examined. The Wife of Bath's prologue is, of course, a confession rather than a romance and is, therefore, generically unique among Chaucer's texts of women who dream. As part of its purpose is to humorously rehearse the misogynistic litany of patriarchy, the prologue lends itself to anti-feminist readings even as the Wife challenges their validity. Of course, those who see Alisoun as a positive representation of a strong, independent, sexual woman and those who see her as an embodiment of misogynistic stereotypes both have a great deal of evidence to work with in her prologue. Indeed, the tendency of the Wife of Bath's prologue to expose the complex of cultural languages present in medieval discourse about women has made her an almost irresistibly attractive subject to critics.¹²⁵ Her ventriloquism of the discourse of misogyny along

¹²⁴ Notably, in these texts both Aeneas, as he is leaving Dido, and Troilus, in his well known dream of Criseyde embracing the boar, do report dreams that "come true" (*Legend of Good Women* 1295 – 99, *Troilus and Criseyde* 5.1234 – 43).

¹²⁵ It is hardly necessary to note that opinions on what the Wife of Bath represents are myriad. She is either a statement of Chaucer's feminism, an anti-feminist portrayal of monstrosity, a ventriloquizing of real

with her reports of resistance to it provide proof that the misogyny of the Middle Ages was in some way challenged by the language of the other, regardless of whether that challenge was expressed directly or through irony and satire. By including a dream report in the Wife's prologue, Chaucer adds dream theory to its already rich mixture of discourses. Although many believe her to be Chaucer's most blatant assertion of his own proto-feminist views, Alisoun's dream confession fails to support such a view. More powerfully than his use of a woman's dream in his other works, Chaucer's depiction of Alisoun's dream links all women and their dreams to deception and misogyny. I argue that, rather than simply *associating* deceptive dreaming with deceptive femininity, by so convincingly ventriloquizing the voice of a woman reporting a dream, Chaucer exploits the heteroglossia of medieval culture as a means of *unifying* diabolical dreaming with the deceitfulness of the daughters of Eve.

As she tells the story of her fourth husband, Alisoun describes how she worked to insure that Jankyn would be her fifth. During their "dalliance" she assures him that the two of them can be married if she becomes a widow again. To seal her seduction of Jankyn, the Wife uses old tricks she has learned from her "dame," including a description of a *somnium* and its interpretation indicating that the marriage will be auspicious:

I bar hym on honde he hadde enchanted me --
My dame taught me that soutilee --
And eek I sayde I mette of hym al nyght,
He wolde han slayn me as I lay upright,
And al my bed was ful of verray blood;

medieval women's thoughts and values, a hodge-podge summary of misogynist literature, or some combination of all of these. She is treated by many critics as if she were a real person, and some of those who acknowledge that she is a product of Chaucer's art still see her as the feminine voice of the poet rather than a masculine construction of a woman's voice. I do not intend to argue any of these sides, nor do I intend to characterize the Wife of Bath as a whole in any way. My interest is in what Chaucer's depiction of her dream reveals about the intersection of dream theory and misogyny. If conclusions regarding her ultimate meaning are to be drawn from the lines in which she describes her dream, I leave that task for another time.

'But yet I hope that ye shal do me good,
For blood bitokeneth gold, as me was taught.'
And al was fals; I dremed of it right naught,
But as I folwed ay my dames loore,
As wel of this as of othere thynges moore. (575-84)

Alisoun openly states that she has invented this dream as part of her seduction of Jankyn, and in addition to the interpretation the Wife provides – that blood betokens gold and, by implication, a profitable marriage – the dream also suggests virginity, a quality Alisoun certainly lacks but one that she would like to exploit symbolically to make herself seem fresher and more attractive to the younger man.¹²⁶ Clearly no stranger to dream theory, Chaucer frequently addressed the question of whether dreams can be trusted as truth-bearing: Troilus, for instance, asks repeatedly how he should interpret and whether he should believe his dream of Criseyde and the boar; *The House of Fame* begins with an invocation asking God to turn every dream to good and a summary of medieval dream theories regarding the validity of various types of dreams; and *The Nun's Priest's Tale* turns on the question of whether dreams are, in fact, portentous. Troilus's dream, of course, is true, Chanticleer's at least partly so; therefore, Chaucer's work acknowledges that medieval men can and do believe in the veracity of dreams. He allows Alisoun, then, to make the most of the cultural capital of dream theory in her manipulative scheme because she may safely assume that the clerk Jankyn, an educated man, will both know dream theory and be open to whatever truth the dream may bear. Even if we suspect that

¹²⁶ For various critical views on the dream, see, for example, Peter G Beidler, *The Wife of Bath*, Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism; (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1996); Carruthers and Pearsall; Dickson; Sarah Disbrow, "The Wife of Bath's Old Wives' Tale," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer: The Yearbook of the New Chaucer Society* 8 (1986); Elaine Tuttle Hansen, "The Wife of Bath and the Mark of Adam," *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 15, no. 4 (1988); H. Marshall Leicester, Jr., "Of a Fire in the Dark: Public and Private Feminism in the Wife of Bath's Tale," *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 11, nos. 1-2 (1984); Lee Patterson, "'For the Wyves Love of Bathe': Feminine Rhetoric and Poetic Resolution in the Roman De La Rose and the Canterbury Tales," *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* 58, no. 3 (1983); Rigby.

Jankyn, well versed in misogyny, could have questioned the veracity of a woman's dream or interpretation, we can see that Alisoun's tactic would have at least suggested certain pleasant possibilities to the clerk, who is unaware that the dream is a lie. Further, Alisoun's dream, if it were true, could authorize her relationship with Jankyn by making it a matter of destiny as much as a matter choice. The Wife's intended use of this manufactured dream depends on all of the positive implications of dream theory to give it manipulative power, but her confession fuses the anxieties of dream theory and misogyny to reveal that deceitfulness is an essential part of the character of all women.

Neither the Wife of Bath's audience of pilgrims nor Chaucer's audience is permitted any doubt that this dream is a lie and the woman a liar. In this regard Alisoun lives up to all of the misogynistic diatribes she has accused her first three husbands of using against her, as well as to the stereotypes of deceitful femininity she applies with her own voice to herself and all women. Addressing the "wise wyves" that she hopes will do as she has done, Alisoun asserts, "For half so boldely kan ther no man / Swere and lyen as a woman kan," and boasting of her skill in manipulating her first three husbands she states, "Deceite, wepyng, spynning God hath yive / To wommen kyndely, whil that they may lyve" (227 – 28, 401 – 02). But, of course, the hundreds of lines preceding this portion of her confession have already established that the Wife is a ready and able liar. Because these misogynistic assertions of women's duplicity seem to come from a woman, and from a woman who at other times challenges misogynistic characterizations, they have a ring of truth that the masculine voices of patristic texts somehow lack. However, as we all know, this is not a woman's voice, but rather the voice of a masculine narrator created by a masculine author. In this convincing feminine voice, the masculine text repeatedly insists that not only this woman but all women are liars.

To this powerfully misogynistic characterization, Chaucer has chosen to add a dream report, but not a report of a "real" even if meaningless dream and not the report of a "real" but

deceptive dream.¹²⁷ Here the dream report itself is the deception. In a manner similar to that by which Jerome's text reifies deception in the body of woman, Chaucer's text transforms women's dreams that are deceptive into women's deception of men. Further, where a woman's deceptive dream might come from misunderstanding, self-deceit, or even a diabolical source, this dream that is deception also has a source: Alisoun's dame. Because Alisoun attributes her ability to manipulate through the deceitful use of dream discourse to her "dame," the identity of this woman is important to any understanding of this portion of her prologue. The *Riverside* explanatory note to line 576 suggests numerous possible identities for Alisoun's "dame," but concludes that the most likely is her own mother. This reference to learning passed from one woman to another along with Alisoun's direct address to the "wise wyves" who, at least part of the time, are presumed to be listening to and learning from her indicate the presence of (or perhaps anxiety about) a female community in which lore can be passed from woman to woman. In Alisoun's case, and in the case of her "dame," the older women pass on techniques for manipulating men to the younger, and images of this type of interaction among women are found throughout medieval literature. The figure of *La Vielle* from *The Romance of the Rose*, a long acknowledged source for much of the Wife's prologue, as well as "*la mere*" in Deschamps's *Miroir de Mariage*, and the three women in Dunbar's "The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo" similarly reflect either the presence of such communities of women engaged in the transmission of women's lore or a belief (and perhaps concern) among men that such communities existed.

In each of these examples, as with the Wife of Bath, the lessons taught by the older women to the younger ones are almost identical to the accusations against women made in misogynistic patriarchal texts. Alisoun's references to her "gossib," "another worthy wyf," and

¹²⁷ I have as yet found no evidence that any of the analogues or sources for the Wife of Bath mention the use of manipulative dream reports. My assumption is that this is one of Chaucer's original additions to the otherwise well-known character type.

her “nece,” with whom she shares intimacies and embarrassing stories about her husbands, suggest that the Wife is part of such a community. Dickson argues that the Wife’s texts (both her prologue and tale) “gesture toward a discursive alternative to patriarchy: a feminine community of readers and speakers,” and she suggests that Chaucer’s portrayal of Alisoun represents a special understanding of the unmet desires of women for such a “discourse community” on the part of the poet.¹²⁸ In each masculine text in which they appear, however, these communities of women and the “dames” who are passing on their “loore” function more as sites of anxiety among men regarding the manipulative power of women and the dangers women pose to their own hegemony than as depictions of women’s desires for communities of their own. Whether Alisoun’s “dame” is her friend, her mother, or another woman, she and the community of women’s lore she represents are a part of the discourse of misogyny rather than a real or desired alternative for women in the Middle Ages. In fact, I argue that the “dame” whose lore Alisoun has learned so that she can seduce and manipulate men *is* her mother and a representation of all mothers or older women who are portrayed in the role of *La Vielle*, the teacher of women’s lore, in the transgressive communities of women imagined in anti-feminist masculine texts. By connecting the deception that is “woman” and the deception that is women’s dreams to the lore of a dame or mother, Chaucer is drawing on the discourses of medieval dream theory and misogyny to emphasize Alisoun’s relationship to Eve. As a representative of all mothers, Alisoun’s “dame” is also a reference to that first mother, Eve, whose deceptive capabilities brought ruin on mankind and have been, according to the discourse of misogyny, passed between women ever since.

Eve’s direct and indirect presence is found throughout the *Wife of Bath’s Prologue*, beginning with Alisoun’s very early assertion that “God bad us for to wexe and multiplie” (28). The Wife is, of course, using the text from Genesis in which God instructs the prelapsarian Adam and Eve to “increase and multiply” as one of her first defenses of her right to sexual self-

¹²⁸ Dickson: 62, 84. For another discussion of the Wife and female communities, see Sturges: 43 - 45.

determination.¹²⁹ When Alisoun later asserts that “Deceite, wepyng, spyngnyng God hath yive / To wommen kyndely, whil that they may lyve,” she is referring to the common portrayal of fallen Eve spinning thread while Adam digs in the ground, as well as to the curse God places on Eve as she and Adam are expelled from Paradise.¹³⁰ Indeed, as a cloth maker herself, Alisoun of Bath is closely associated with the commonplace medieval association of Eve and spinning. Finally, Jankyn’s book of wicked wives begins, as one would expect, with Eve

that for hir wikkednesse
Was al mankynde broght to wrecchednesse,
For which that Jhesu Crist hymself was slayn,
That boghte us with his herte blood agayn.
Lo, heere expres of womman may ye fynde
That womman was the los of al mankynde. (715 – 20)

The inescapable presence of Eve throughout the Wife’s prologue connects the Wife’s “dame” to all mothers and daughters who must labor in this world under her curse. Eve’s deceitfulness, her seduction of Adam into sin, is the “loore” passed from mother to daughter, from woman to woman, that allows them to continue to seduce, manipulate, and deceive men. When Alisoun learns from her “dame” to fabricate a dream and a propitious interpretation so that she can manipulate and seduce a man, the purveyor of the deceptive dream, in so many texts a fiend deceiving a woman, becomes the woman herself. In a stunning feat of literary legerdemain, Chaucer transforms the devil whispering the dream into the ear of the woman into the mother teaching the use of deceptive dreaming to her daughter, and the anxieties in dream theory regarding the diabolical dream are almost magically sublimated into the discourse of misogyny.

It might appear, then, that the Wife’s dream is as uncomplicated a fusion of discourses

¹²⁹ “*benedixitque illis Deus et ait crescite et multiplicamini*” Genesis 1:28.

¹³⁰ Steven Justice makes a great point of the importance of John Ball’s Blackheath sermon (“Whanne Adam dalfe and Eve span, / Who was thanne a gentil man”) to the Peasant Rising of 1381. For my purposes the significance of this sermon lies in the apparent ubiquity of the association of Eve with spinning. Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 102 - 03.

as possible and that any ambiguity revealing heteroglossia similar to that found in other masculine depictions of dreaming women has been eliminated or completely hidden by persistent medieval anti-feminism. If we take into account only the falseness of the dream, its intended use to deceive and manipulate Jankyn, and what its interpretation directly and indirectly implies to the clerk, such a conclusion is warranted. However, the one aspect of Alisoun's dream not yet considered, its actual content, does offer a glimpse of another language at work. We have already seen in previous Chaucerian texts a decided sympathy toward the female characters – even one as thoroughly subject to misogynistic treatment as Criseyde. Knowing as we do from her own mouth that the Wife has been the victim of Jankyn's violence, we can see in the content of the dream a dramatization of her suffering and fear. Alisoun tells Jankyn that "blood bitokeneth gold," but as Leicester points out, "in the dream blood betokens not only loss of virginity, but also death."¹³¹ Like Criseyde's dream of the eagle, Alisoun's dream is often treated critically as a wish-fulfillment fantasy, but the grisly violence it portrays cannot be ignored, especially when the woman reporting the dream is also depicted as a victim of violence outside of the dream. Hansen notes the word play present in Alisoun attribution of her special attachment to Jankyn to the fact that he "was of his love daungerous" to her (514). Although "daungerous" has many harmless meanings in Middle English, it also carries its contemporary meaning and may reflect the Wife's understanding that Jankyn is, indeed, a danger to her life and person.¹³² It is only slightly more than fifty lines later that Chaucer has Alisoun recount her falsified dream of being murdered in her bed by the "daungerous" Jankyn. Although I would not

¹³¹ Marshall H. Leicester, *The Disenchanted Self* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 103.

¹³² Elaine Tuttle Hansen, "Of His Love Dangerous to Me": Liberation, Subversion, and Domestic Violence in the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale," in *Geoffrey Chaucer: The Wife of Bath-Complete, Authoritative Text with Biographical and Historical Contexts, Critical History, and Essays from Five Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, ed. Peter G. Beidler, Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism (Boston: St. Martin's, 1996), 278.

argue that Chaucer is making a direct statement against domestic violence in the content of Alisoun's dream, I do argue that he may have chosen this content over some other as a reflection of the very real physical vulnerability of medieval women. This is, of course, only a subtle disturbance in the very potent anti-feminism at work in the Wife's dream report, but it does indicate the possibility of sympathy for the woman whose deceitfulness so cunningly intersects with fears of deception in dream theory discourse.

2.5 Conclusion

Each of these masculine texts offers a view of women and dreaming that undermines the sense that women are worthy of, capable of, or subject to meaningful dreaming that is not in some way associated with deception. As portrayed in these works, the bodies of women are too physical, too seductive, too easily deceived, and too deceitful to participate in the transcendent truth available to the spirits of men through dream and vision experiences. In these fictionalized accounts, the body/spirit dualism that pervades both dream theory and anti-feminism erects a wall between dreaming women and the revelatory power of the transcendent dream. With each of these women's dreams, we are able to see how the discourse of dream theory is coupled with the discourse of misogyny to express the conviction that women cannot and do not experience truth-bearing dreams. One might expect that the sympathetic views towards women as victims of masculine deception or oppression that we see in Chaucer's dreaming women would offer an effective challenge to traditional anti-feminism and demonstrate that the power of transcendent dreams and visions is available to both women and men. Instead we find that sympathy for women produces only small fissures in the wall of dualism, for Chaucer's women dreamers, like those in other masculine medieval texts, remain largely cut off from the possibility of a powerful, revelatory dream. Chaucer's brilliant portrayal of the Wife of Bath, moreover, includes a remarkably effective anti-feminist unification of woman, devil, and dreamer. Nevertheless, discursive complexity in the period is demonstrated by inconsistencies and

ambiguities in these texts that disturb, complicate, or subvert general antifeminism and the underlying dualism that separates women from the spiritual realm.

CHAPTER 3

DREAMING WOMEN IN EARLY MODERN DRAMA

3.1 Introduction

As we have seen, by developing a connection between women and deception, masculine texts of the Middle Ages foreclose feminine access to the authorizing potential of revelatory dreaming. Women's dreams and visions are so tightly interwoven with deception that any possible truth they may bear is fatally tainted, as is any power or authority that might accompany the revelatory dream. Early modern drama also denies women the positive *power* of significant dreaming, but does so by a different mechanism. Without denying that women may have access to truth-bearing, revelatory, and even prophetic dreams, early modern masculine dramatic texts connect women's dreams and visions with female transgression, deleterious effects on men, or both. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, female transgression is the essential problem of the play, and the only woman's dream in the text unites women's dreaming with the transgression of Eve that ruined mankind. In so doing, the play draws on body/spirit dualism generated through and supported by misogynistic views of Eve. In some cases early modern drama is less reliant on overt dualistic denial of women's access to the spiritual realm. However, these texts still rely on the traditions of misogyny founded in body/spirit dualism based in Eve's transgression and guilt for man's destruction along with theories of dreaming that emphasize the separation of useful and revelatory dreaming from meaningless dreaming associated with the body and quotidian existence. Thus, even when a woman is able to dream truthfully, her dreams help no one and only emphasize her association with the downfall of man. In dramas such as *Henry IV: Part II*, *Macbeth*, *The White Devil*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*, we see the dreams of ambitious women leading to or recapitulating the downfall of men. Other dramas, like *Sir Thomas More*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and *Julius*

Caesar, make use of conventions of political prophecy to connect women's prophetic dreaming to man's death and destruction. This anti-feminist paradigm uniting women's dreams to men's woe is fairly uniformly established in dramatic texts throughout the period; nevertheless, as we have seen before, the fusion of ambiguous discourses inevitably produces inconsistencies through which we may detect the presence of "the voice of the 'other.'"¹³³ Between the code of misogyny and the theoretical and religious discourses supporting it lies a gap through which we detect, however faintly, language validating the feminine. Close reading of the dreams of women in early modern drama reveals the persistence of the anti-feminist conventions of the Middle Ages into the early modern period, along with variations in the ways these conventions are worked out in portrayals of dreaming women.

3.2 Early Modern Discourse on Dreams and Women

Founded on the writings of classical and patristic authorities, dream theories of the Renaissance, like those of the Middle Ages, tend to categorize dreams and visions dualistically, either as worthless productions of the body or as thresholds of transcendence from which men might peer into the future or partake of the divine. Moreover, writings of skeptics who question the validity of dreams are as apt to demonstrate the instabilities found in the cultural language of dream theory as are those of true believers. Although complete, stable disbelief regarding any possible transcendent power of dreams is present in a few Renaissance texts, most of those warning the reader not to put his faith in dreams face the conundrum of whether to rationalize dreams as entirely somatic and meaningless or to fear their significance as tools used by witches and other diabolical actors to lead Christians to ruin.¹³⁴ Thomas Nashe's much quoted dismissal of dreams as "nothing else but a bubbling scum or froth of the fancy, which the day

¹³³ Finke, 8.

¹³⁴ Peter Holland discusses Reginald Scot as one example of a true skeptic. While Scot does suggest that witches engage in dream interpretation, his contention is that they are making it all up to cheat or abuse others. For Scot, then, unlike most who comment on dreams, no real ambiguity exists. Holland, 130-31.

hath left undigested; or an after-feast made of the fragments of idle imaginations,” for example, appears in close conjunction with his assertions that “[i]t is not to be gainsaid but the devil can transform himself into an angel of light, appear in the day as well as in the night” and “those whom he [the devil] dare not united or together encounter, disjoined and divided he will one by one assail in their sleep.” Indeed, throughout his witty and digressive essay, Nashe’s apparent intent to dismiss dreams as entirely inconsequential is matched by his contradictory desire to assure his audience that on those occasions when frightening dreams are the products of supernatural intervention, the true Christian “with the least thought of faith” may dispel them.¹³⁵

In the writings of early modern theorists less skeptical than Nashe, dreams and visions need not be only meaningless or dangerous; for although they continue to be understood primarily as insignificant rehearsals of the day’s activity or physically induced fodder for medical diagnoses, the supernatural or divine origins of dreams and their inspirational and transcendent potential are not to be ignored. According to believers, the truth-bearing dream given through divine rather than diabolical intervention could and did occur, but distinguishing such from its meaningless or deceptive counterpart was not the province of the uneducated or ungodly. In the dedication to *The Moste pleasaunte Arte of the Interpretation of Dreames* (1576), for example, Thomas Hill asserts that the “difference of true dreames from the vayne ought diligently to be noted,” and he validates the medical use of dreams, agreeing with Galen and Hippocrates that physicians who understand the importance of their patients’ dreams and read them correctly may “the redyar and aptlyar appoint a perfite diet and due medecines.” Hill’s primary objective, however, is to assure his reader that significant dreams “seene by grave and sober persons”

¹³⁵ Thomas Nashe, “The Terrors of the Night or, a Discourse of Apparitions,” in *Thomas Nashe*, ed. Stanley Wells, The Stratford-Upon-Avon Library (London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd., 1964), 147-48, 153. I find it surprising from a scholarly perspective that the widely quoted “idle froth” comment is rarely contextualized with Nashe’s accompanying comments accepting the reality of dream visitations by the devil.

are biblically and historically warranted means of defending themselves “from the instant eviles and periles” or of “attayning of good things to come.”¹³⁶ The ambiguous possibilities of dreams are also expounded in the later, shorter text, *A Most Briefe and pleasant Treatise of the Interpretation of Sundrie Dreames* (1601), which asserts that while many dreams originate in “matters past, which move againe and bring to remembrance such thought and wrought in the day time,” others accurately predict the future when interpreted by “such a person, as can distinguish the similitudes of al things, and know the conditions of all sorts of people, and their professions in the law and faith of Christ.”¹³⁷ This acknowledgement of the indeterminacy of dreams underscores the general ambiguity of dream theory in the early modern period and emphasizes that only someone especially trained, godly, and gifted has any hope of correctly

¹³⁶ Thomas Hill, *The Moste Pleasuante Arte of the Interpretacion of Dreames Whereunto Is Annexed Sundry Problemes with Apte Aunsweares Neare Agreeing to the M Atter, and Very Rare Examples, Not Like the Extant in the English Tongue. Gathered by the Former Auctour Thomas Hill Londoner: And Now Newly Imp Rinted*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 / 639:11 (Imprinted at London : In Fleetestreate neare to S. Dunstones Church by Thomas Marsh, Anno 1576).

¹³⁷ Thomas Hill, *A Most Briefe and Pleasant Treatise of the Interpretation of Sundrie Dreames Intituled to Be Iosephs, and Sundry Other Dreames out of the Worke of the Wise Salomon. Being in All 140. Written First in the Hebrue Tongue. Also Sundrie Problemes or Demaunds, with Their Natural Answers Vnto Sundry Dreames Annexed Thereunto: All Which Are Now Gathered and Englished out of a Most Ancient Copie in the Latine Tongue, for the Recreation of Wits at Vacant Time and Leisure*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 / 1991:04 (Imprinted at London : by Simon Stafford: and are to be sold by Roger Iackson, at the signe of the white Hart in Fleetstreet, 1601.), Preface, 2. It is worth noting that even the most rational of Renaissance thinkers were susceptible to the belief that dreams could at times be supernaturally inspired. Indeed, Peter Holland notes the “pleasingly paradoxical” way in which Decartes himself attributes at least part of his pursuit of rationalism to a revelatory dream experience, a *somnium* that he experienced in 1601. Holland, 127.

evaluating the experience.¹³⁸ Dream theories, then, remain as problematic and dualistic in the Renaissance as they had been in the Middle Ages and, therefore, as difficult to seamlessly combine with misogyny in depictions of women dreaming.

The instability of early modern dream theory, marked as it is by uncertainty regarding the nature of any particular dream, is similar to but simpler than that marking early modern theories on women, for while dreams themselves occupy a continuum from somatic to transcendent, a certain dream may be meaningful or meaningless but not both. Similarly, in theory, women as a group may be “thoroughly evil and at best a mere biological necessity,” or they might occupy a continuum from being “good in a limited and humble way but of inferior value compared to men . . . [to being] good and necessary equally with men.” Very occasionally, women might even be characterized as superior to men.¹³⁹ Early modern conduct books written to and for women, however, suggest the inconsistencies inherent in all of these characterizations. Their authors clearly presume the presence in at least some women of a desire for goodness (defined as chastity, silence, and obedience to men) and an ability to learn proper behaviors and attitudes (defined the same way). However, in their relentless harping on

¹³⁸ This attitude appears to be something of a reversal of the earliest Christian attitudes towards dreaming and may reflect an early modern tendency to rely less on early church teaching and more on classical, pagan sources. Stroumsa contends that, unlike the pagans who relied on oracles and seers as a special class of dream interpreters, early church fathers “democratized” dream interpretation by making it the province of anyone sufficiently ascetic. It could be argued that Reformation and Protestant dogma forced the rejection of the ascetic early Christian model and, thus, initiated a return to classical understanding of dream interpretation. However, it could be equally argued that Stroumsa’s contention actually fails to acknowledge an essential, if altered, elitism in the early Christian theory and that the early modern model is more “democratic” than that of the early church because it places the gift of dream interpretation in God’s hands and makes it an almost Calvinistic sign of election. Stroumsa, 209-210.

¹³⁹ Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 10-11.

the need for women of all stages of life to take extreme measures to preserve their chastity and in their constant exhortations of obedience to husbands, they simultaneously imply the same evil nature in women as that expressed in the most egregiously misogynistic diatribes: that a woman faces the constant danger of failing to control her “aspiring minde and wanton will” and thus becoming “a woe unto man.”¹⁴⁰ In his manual for women’s behavior and education written for Catherine of Aragon’s use with her daughter Mary, Juan Luis Vives insists that even as children girls are “more inclined toward pleasure” than boys. To save girls from this “natural disposition” to sin, Vives insists that “[a]ny male should be excluded from their company.” He characterizes grown women as “weak creature[s] and of uncertain judgment and . . . easily deceived” into immorality. Vives counsels that “a good woman . . . [should] stay at home and be unknown to others” to preserve her chastity and reputation.¹⁴¹ If a virtuous queen and her daughter merit instruction so pointedly challenging any assumption of female moral fortitude, women as a group must indeed have been understood to suffer from intense depravity.¹⁴² Theoretically, then, the concept of a virtuous woman is an ambiguous signifier because “good” women simultaneously occupy two antithetical positions: an evil woman is just a woman, but a

¹⁴⁰ Joseph Swetnam, *The Araignment of Leuud, Idle, Froward, and Vnconstant Women or the Vanitie of Them, Choose You Whether : With a Commendation of Wise, Vertuous and Honest Women : Pleasant for Married Men, Profitable for Young Men, and Hurtfull to None*, Early English Books, 1475-1640 / 1758:15 (London : Printed by George Purslowe for Thomas Archer, and are to be solde at his shop in Popes-head Pallace, neere the Royall Exchange, 1615.), 1.

¹⁴¹ Juan Luis Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman: A Sixteenth-Century Manual*, ed. Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil Jr., trans. Charles Fantazzi, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 55, 72.

¹⁴² For an interesting and informative discussion of the question of “female ontology” in the Renaissance based on exegesis of Genesis in Catholic, Protestant and Puritan commentary, see James Grantham Turner, *One Flesh: Paradisal Marriage and Sexual Relations in the Age of Milton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 96-123.

good woman is always also an evil woman suppressed by patriarchal control. Masculine texts attempt to smooth over or ignore the gaps created by this paradox to maintain the illusion of a unified patriarchal narrative, but even texts that seem to suppress languages other than the patriarchal contain these detectable discursive fissures that reveal the complex of cultural languages that we have seen at work in medieval texts such as *Genesis B*, mystery plays about Pilate's wife, and Chaucer's works.

Where early modern, masculine, dramatic works attempt to suppress the logical inconsistencies inherent in the imbrication of discourses defining early modern woman and the indeterminacy of dreams and visions, a generally unfavorable connection between women and dreams or visions emerges. The resulting premise assumes that if all women, even the good ones, represent the danger of "woe to man," then their dreaming must necessarily represent this danger as well. With very few exceptions, whatever position on the continuum of relevance a particular woman's dream or vision occupies in these texts, it is ultimately linked to some deleterious outcome for man through association, source, or content. The overarching link between women and the ruin of man, of course, has both its root and its explanation in the Genesis narrative, and some of these texts overtly bind the dreaming woman to Eve. With or without the presence of an explicit connection to the original Fall of Man, though, the women who dream in early modern drama generally bear the mark of Eve's guilt and the trouble she represents for men because of the established link between their dreams and men's harm.

3.3 Dreaming in a Dream

Although its title suggests that the whole of the play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* should be appropriate subject matter for an examination of dreaming in the Renaissance, its inclusion as a whole in this project would be decidedly problematic. Peter Holland expresses this difficulty best when he asserts that, "however much *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is 'like a dream', it is not one. It contains only one description of something that may unequivocally be

taken to be a dream, one 'real' dream, Hermia's dream of the serpent."¹⁴³ Nevertheless, this quandary of equivocality that permeates the drama--the question of what is or is not a dream experience, the problem of whether a dream is only a dream or the "revelation of another reality" known as a vision, and the exploration of the considerable power of illusion in the form of dreaming or of drama, which are all major themes of the play--demonstrates the overwhelming centrality of the ambiguity and uncertainty in early modern conceptions of dreams and visions on which my argument depends.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, the contradictions of anti-feminism that pervade medieval and early modern texts are exacerbated in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* because it is a marriage comedy and, therefore, must cover over the problems of misogyny to generate a universally happy ending far more skillfully than is required in a tragedy or history.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Peter Holland, "Introduction," in *A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Oxford Shakespeare* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

¹⁴⁴ A complete exploration of the implications of these themes is far beyond the scope of my project, but Peter Holland's introduction to his edition of the play (see note 143) and Garber's chapter on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* offer insight into these themes. Marjorie Garber, *Dream in Shakespeare* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 59-87.

¹⁴⁵ It is the grossest possible understatement to say that a vast variety of complementary and contradictory views on Shakespeare and early modern anti-feminism abounds. A small sample of texts that address misogyny or the lack thereof in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* includes Bruce Boehrer, "Economies of Desire in a *Midsummer Night's Dream*," *Shakespeare Studies* 32 (2004); Shirley Nelson Garner, "A Midsummer Night's Dream 'Jack Shall Have Jill;/Nought Shall Go Ill'," *Women's Studies* 9 (1981); Germaine Greer, *Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Maurice Hunt, "Individuation in a *Midsummer Night's Dream*," *The South Central Modern Language Association* 3, no. 2 (1986); Paul A. Olson, "A Midsummer Night's Dream and the Meaning of Court Marriage," *ELH* 24, no. 2 (1957). A sample of relatively recent texts more generally addressing Shakespeare and women includes Cristina Leon Alfar, *Fantasies of Female Evil: The Dynamics of Gender and Power in Shakespearean Tragedy* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003); Linda Bamber, *Comic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982); Kate Chedgoy,

A thorough study of the play's dream-like features (including for example Bottom's dream, which is not a dream at all) or the role of anti-feminism in the play, would require exploration of issues far outside the purview of this project. Because my concern here is only the depiction of the actual dreams and visions of women in masculine texts of the Renaissance, I must narrow my focus to that single "real" dream in the play, Hermia's dream.

The fact that the only real dream experienced in a play about dreaming is a woman's dream, or more properly, a woman's nightmare, should perhaps not be surprising. Although *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is certainly concerned with exploring the nature and significance of dreaming, it is equally concerned with reinforcing a culture of masculine hegemony in the face of feminine challenges to male authority and control. As a comedy, of course, the play ultimately minimizes and disarms the cultural anxieties it investigates, but in its exploitation of dream theory and theories of women we find a site of patriarchal monological narrative that is at least partially disrupted by cultural heteroglossia. While Hermia's dream is clearly significant on levels from the dramatic to the psychological, I argue that, in terms of the early modern complex of cultural languages, it primarily serves the maintenance of masculine hegemony by associating the woman dreamer with Eve's transgression and the Fall of Man.¹⁴⁶ However, as with other

Shakespeare, Feminism, and Gender (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Irene G. Dash, *Wooing, Wedding, and Power: Women in Shakespeare's Plays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981); Juliette Dusinberre, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996); David Mann, *Shakespeare's Women: Performance and Conception* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Phyllis Rackin, *Shakespeare and Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁴⁶ Several texts that explore topics relevant to an understanding of the place of the Bible and biblical material in Shakespeare, such as his biblical knowledge, orthodoxy, religious preferences, include Catherine Belsey, "The Serpent in the Garden: Shakespeare, Marriage and Material Culture," *Seventeenth Century* 11, no. 1 (1996); Richard Dutton, Alison Findlay, and Richard Wilson, ed., *Theatre and Religion: Lancastrian Shakespeare* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2003); Peter Milward, *Shakespeare's Religious Background* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974); Dennis Taylor and David

women's dreams depicted in early modern drama, where gaps in the narrative of patriarchy are detectable, they reveal the presence of other discourses in which women and significant dreaming may be positively rather than negatively associated.

Hermia's alignment with Eve is established from the play's outset, beginning with her status as a transgressive woman. Because it opens with a celebration of successful masculine suppression of female agency in the form of Theseus's martial victory over and imminent marital possession of the Amazon queen Hippolyta, the play establishes the triumph of patriarchy as its foundation, but the problem around which the play is built is one of female disobedience to masculine authority: Hermia's desire to marry the man of her choice and thus remove herself from the homo-social traffic in women represented by her father's agreement to wed her to Demetrius.¹⁴⁷ The choices given to her by Theseus are obedience, death, or the cloistered existence of a nun, and actually amount to only two choices, as the nunnery option is characterized by Theseus as "withering on a virgin thorn," a sort of living death.¹⁴⁸ Thus, the first eighty lines of the play establish a very strong parallel to the Genesis narrative of the Fall.

Beauregard, ed., *Shakespeare and the Culture of Christianity in Early Modern England* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003).

¹⁴⁷ Maureen Quilligan brilliantly analyzes attempts on the part of various female characters in Shakespeare to remove themselves from the traffic in women as defined by Gayle Rubin in her seminal 1975 essay. Quilligan does not, however, directly address Hermia's situation in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. See Maureen Quilligan, *Incest and Agency in Elizabeth's England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005). Also, for definition and analysis of traffic in women, see Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975).

¹⁴⁸ Shakespeare, "A Midsummer Night's Dream," in *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*, ed. Ann Thompson, Richard Proudfoot, and David Scott Kastan (London: Thompson Learning, 2007), 1.1.77. All references to Shakespeare's works are taken from the Arden edition of the complete works and will henceforth be given parenthetically in text by act, scene, and line number.

Just as Adam and Eve were given the choice between the obedience of abstaining from the fruit of the forbidden tree or death, Hermia is offered a similar choice: she must either obediently renounce the forbidden Lysander, the object of her desire, or choose one of two deaths, the quick death of execution or the lingering death of the cloister. Notably, this pre-lapsarian parallel that sets Hermia firmly in the position of Eve is accomplished long before the wood that serves as a symbolic Eden is introduced.

The flight of the lovers into the wood outside Athens, then, rather than freeing Hermia from her alignment with Eve, actually enhances this link. In the quasi-Edenic setting of the forest, Hermia's association with pre-lapsarian Eve expands to include a connection to Eve's guilt for the Fall of Man. Although the dark woodland setting of the lovers' confusion holds many interpretive possibilities, its Edenic qualities cannot be overlooked.¹⁴⁹ Marjorie Garber notes that the wood is a "parodic version of Eden, a timeless but paradoxically disordered realm."¹⁵⁰ Before the entrance of the four human lovers, the idyllic wood already suffers the deleterious effects of female transgression because the discord between Titania and Oberon has resulted in disruptions of nature including "contagious fogs," crop failures, and alterations of the

¹⁴⁹ For example, the wood has been understood as a site where individual identity is lost by Maurice Hunt, as a Foucauldian heterotopia by Laurel Moffatt, as an echo of "Dante's *selva oscura*" and "Spenser's Wood of Error" by Olson, as a form of *hortus conclusus* suitable for the rites of May by Robert Presson, and as a form of Freudian shorthand for sexual anxiety by M. D. Faber. Hunt; Laurel Moffatt, "The Woods as Heterotopia in *A Midsumemr Night's Dream*," *Studia Neophilologica* 76 (2004); Olson; Robert K. Presson, "Some Traditional insances of Setting in Shakespeare's Plays," *The Modern Language Review* 61, no. 1 (1966); M.D. Faber, "Hermia's Dream: Royal Road to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*," *Literature and Psychology* 22 (1972).

¹⁵⁰ Garber, 71. In fairness, I must point out that Garber's point is somewhat contradictory to my own, as she sees the wood as an Eden awaiting a "fortunate fall," where I see the allusions to the Fall in the wood as decidedly unfortunate, especially for Hermia.

seasons (2.1.88-117). The quarrel between Oberon and Titania, which includes “forgeries of jealousy” over adulterous relationships on both sides, is currently fueled by Titania’s refusal to obey Oberon’s demand that she give him the changeling boy she is fostering; therefore, the disorderly events of the night in the forest find their origin in female transgression, and it is for this transgression that Titania will be first humiliated and then brought to submission so that patriarchal order can be restored (2.1.81). Added to her original refusal to obey her father, Hermia’s arrival in the wood is an act of transgression that parallels Titania’s, as Hermia is acting in defiance of the highest human masculine authority, Theseus, just as Titania’s transgression represents defiance of the highest fairy masculine authority, Oberon.

The presence of serpents in this twisted Eden is also established before Hermia dreams of them. Oberon describes a harmless snake with “enamell’d skin” in the paradisiacal bower where Titania sleeps, but Titania’s own fairy servant sings an incantation to ward off “spotted snakes with double tongue” that might come near and injure the sleeping Titania. In both cases, of course, the image of the sleeping, therefore vulnerable, woman in a garden setting with a snake cannot help but conjure a similar image of Eve naively conversing with the serpent in Paradise (2.1.255, 2.2.9). At the point that Hermia finally experiences her “real” dream, the entire Genesis setting has been duplicated, though transformed: something desirable has been forbidden and obedience demanded; a threat of death has been issued; an Edenic landscape has been provided, complete with snakes both harmless and dangerous; and a woman is actively transgressing the patriarchal will to which she is expected to bend. The moment is ripe for Hermia’s dream.

Even though it is brief, Hermia’s dream is a remarkably rich text for critical interpretation. Having run away from Athens and finding themselves lost in the forest, Hermia and Lysander decide to go to sleep. Lysander, though, clearly has other activities in mind, and Hermia must repeatedly demand that he “lie further off” (2.2.43). After being mistakenly enchanted by Puck, Lysander awakes, falls in love with Helena, and runs off after his new love.

Unaware that she has been abandoned, Hermia wakes and attempts to report her nightmare to

Lysander:

“Help me, Lysander, help me! Do thy best
To pluck this crawling serpent from my breast!
Ay me, for pity! What a dream was here!
Lysander, look how I do quake with fear.
Methought a serpent ate my heart away,
And you sat smiling at his cruel prey.
Lysander! What, remov'd? Lysander! lord!
What, out of hearing? Gone? No sound, no word?
Alack, where are you? Speak, and if you hear;
Speak, of all loves I swoon almost with fear.
No? Then I well perceive you are not nigh.
Either death or you I'll find immediately.”(2.2.144-55)

The dramatic function of this dream, paralleling in symbolic terms the events happening on stage, is undeniable. As she dreams of a serpent cruelly wounding her heart and an apparently unfeeling Lysander looking on with amusement or approval, Hermia is in the process of being replaced in Lysander's affections by her best friend. To miss this metaphorical doubling of the action on stage in Hermia's dream would require a willful blindness. Likewise, the psychoanalytic function of the dream is fairly easy to spot. Most scholars who comment at any length on Hermia's dream find the temptation to engage in Freudian analysis irresistible, but as Peter Holland points out, “it did not need Freud to identify the serpent of Hermia's dream as a phallic threat.”¹⁵¹ The smiling Lysander separated from his menacing penis in the form of a serpent clearly demonstrates Hermia's anxiety over her inevitable submission to both Lysander's and her own sexual desires and her psychic need to separate the Lysander she knows as her distanced, courtly lover from the inescapably present, physical man with whom she will soon be intimate, if not this night, then on their imminent wedding night. The allusion to the serpent in the Garden of Eden in Hermia's dream is also fairly universally acknowledged, and the repetition of references to serpents and snakes throughout the play heightens the

¹⁵¹ Holland, "Introduction," 13. For a complexly layered psychoanalytic approach to Hermia's dream, see Norman N. Holland, "Hermia's Dream," in *The Dream and the Text: Essays on Literature and Language*, ed. Carol Schreier Rupprecht (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).

sense that in this garden full of fun-loving fairies and comically confused lovers, temptation and danger lurk under the cover of darkness.

The serpent eating her heart, however, is not the only allusion to the Fall in Hermia's account of her dream. The last line of the passage, "Either death or you I'll find immediately," echoes the choice she has been offered by Theseus of obedience or death, which is itself an echo of the commandment given to Adam and Eve in Paradise. The choice Hermia offers herself, though, is between death and Lysander. In Athens, choosing Lysander has been defined as the equivalent of choosing death, but here in the woods Hermia casts him for herself as the alternative to death. It is significant that Hermia does not consciously know at this time of Lysander's emotional defection because what she is demanding as an alternative to death is his physical presence, not his affection. Hermia's adjustment of the terms of the command of patriarchal authority is not unlike the re-interpretation of God's command given by the serpent in the garden to Eve:

²And the woman said vnto the serpent, We eate of the fruite of the trees of the garden, ³ But of the fruite of the tree which is in the middes of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eate of it, neither shall ye touche it, lest ye die. ⁴ Then the serpent said to the woman, Ye shall not die at all, ⁵ But God doeth knowe, that when ye shall eate thereof, your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and euill. (Genesis 3:2-5)¹⁵²

At the point in the narrative that Eve chooses to eat the fruit, the original choice between obedience and death has been altered. That is, once Eve chooses to eat, obedience is eliminated as one of Eve's options, and the alternatives become instead a wager on one of two outcomes: the death promised by God or the knowledge of good and evil promised by the serpent. The knowledge of good and evil has been commonly, though not universally, interpreted as some sort of sexual awakening for Adam and Eve; therefore, this wager can be

¹⁵² *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).

restated as taking a chance on the two possible outcomes of death or sexual initiation.¹⁵³ Hermia's dream and her reaction to it recreate this transformation of option into wager. The serpent in Hermia's dream offers a psychic experience of the sexual union she has denied Lysander in her demands that he make his bed physically far away from her. As unpleasant and frightening as this dream has been, she awakens from it seeking his physical proximity. Where the biblical serpent offers the knowledge of good and evil as one term of Eve's wager, we can say that Hermia's dream serpent offers sexual initiation as a term of her wager by causing her to desire Lysander sexually as well as emotionally, or perhaps by revealing to her that she already desires Lysander in both of these ways. When Hermia asserts that she will find either death or Lysander, the implication is that of a wager rather than a choice, and Lysander's physical proximity is the equivalent term to the knowledge of good and evil or sexual initiation offered in the biblical narrative of the Fall. In this exegetical tradition, the sin of Eve that leads to the Fall of Man is accomplished when she chooses disobedience, and rather than only receiving one term of her wager, she receives both. Her sexual awakening gives her the seductive power to lure Adam to his doom, and death for both of them and their progeny is the ultimate outcome of her choice. For Hermia this choice is neither conscious nor stated, but it is implied by her restatement of her original options as a wager between death and Lysander. Thus, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the only "real" dream, the dream of a woman, not only links a woman's dreams to a man's downfall through allusion to the Garden of Eden and the biblical narrative of the Fall, but actually re-produces the patriarchal burden for the Fall placed on all women through Eve.

This bleak representation of the triumph of misogyny over feminine self-determination represented by Hermia's alignment with Eve is not, however, the end of the analysis. Because

¹⁵³ Evans, *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition*. Evans gives an exhaustive account of Rabbinical and Christian interpretations of the Fall, including the exegetical traditions that equate the knowledge of good and evil with sex.

the entire play is built around the indeterminacy of dreams, the cultural work done by Hermia's dream is just as questionable as the reality of the couples' experiences in the wood becomes after Oberon orders another charm to make "all this derision / . . . seem a dream and fruitless vision" (3.2.370-71). The economy of indeterminacy created through the ambiguity of dream theory that the play exploits so effectively in its exploration of the power of illusion also serves to undercut its anti-feminist message by rendering it and all of its associations equally unstable.

Further, the "submerged Eden pun in 'fruit'" noted by Garber opens another significant gap in this amalgamation of dream theory and misogyny.¹⁵⁴ If the entire vision of the night's experience is ultimately "fruitless," Hermia's connection to Eve loses much of its power. Even Oberon's use of the term "vision" rather than "dream" here destabilizes the anti-feminism present in the play; for, as Peter Holland makes clear, the transformation of dream into vision based on the continuum of dream significance found in early modern dream theory is deeply significant in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Holland argues that part of the message of the play is that a *dream* is a "nothing that is . . . powerfully something," but a *vision* is "not the false or trivial world of dream but a revelation of another reality."¹⁵⁵ In other words, the language used in the play indicates that a dream is airy nothing containing the potential to be understood as more than that, but a vision always means something. A vision is transformative and enlightening. The "fruitless vision" into which Oberon transforms the night's experiences is, therefore, oxymoronic, and as such it further destabilizes the overriding connection between Hermia and Eve. Moreover, while the real experiences the couples have endured are explicitly transformed into vision, Hermia's dream is not. On the continuum of significance in the play's terms, it remains a dream or nightmare, not a vision.

The ambiguity of dream theory that creates slippage undermining the misogynistic message of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is paralleled by the ambiguities of early modern

¹⁵⁴ Garber, 61.

¹⁵⁵ Holland, "Introduction," 20-21.

theories of women that subvert the anti-feminism of Hermia's dream. Because she only symbolically or subconsciously chooses sexuality over chastity, Hermia remains in the ambiguous state of the "good" woman even though she has transgressed patriarchal authority by defying both her father and Theseus. Indeed, though stubborn and willful, Hermia is so pure a woman that even an unsupervised night in the forest with her lover does not suggest an opportunity for unchastity. In addition, Hermia's actual transgression and her dream of sexual initiation are far from disastrous for any man. Neither Theseus, nor Egeus, nor Lysander, nor Demetrius is worse off in the end of the play than he was in the beginning. The ultimate harmlessness of Hermia's defiance of patriarchy renders her alignment with Eve nearly untenable, as it implies an ultimate harmlessness in Eve's transgression as well. Thus, an alternate discourse in which women are harmless, thus guiltless, is present beneath the façade of seamless anti-feminism.

As has often been noted, Hermia, the transgressive daughter who sets this play in motion, is silenced early in Act 4, and her last line is merely an acknowledgement of her father's presence. Even Hippolyta and Titania speak only twenty-seven of the remaining six hundred lines of the play that follow the silencing of Hermia. While the depiction of a dreaming woman in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* follows the typical pattern in early modern masculine texts of linking women's dreams to men's destruction by allusively situating Hermia in the guilty place of Eve, gaps and incongruities in this overarching effect do indicate the presence of cultural languages other than that of masculine hegemony. Present though they may be, however, the exercise of these competing discourses is successfully and overtly limited by the silencing of the women of the play.

3.4 Dreaming of Power

Dreams connected to a woman's destructive ambition are a variation on the alignment of dreaming, women, and disaster found in early modern drama. Eleanor from Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Part II*, Lady Macbeth, and Vittoria from Webster's *White Devil* are women whose

ambitions are linked to the downfall of a men, and all three are portrayed as dreamers. Eleanor's is not a dream foretelling the death or downfall of her husband but is rather a dream suggesting that her husband Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, will be king and, more importantly to the ambitious woman, that she will be queen. After her husband has described his own ominous nightmare, Eleanor reports her "morning's dream" to him. Manfred Weidhorn has observed that in late antiquity and the Middle Ages "a vague tradition had arisen that morning dreams are prophetic," and it is probably to this tradition that Eleanor alludes when she specifies the time in which her dream occurred.¹⁵⁶ She describes sitting

". . . in seat of majesty
In the cathedral church of Westminster,
And in that chair where kings and queens are crowned,
Where Henry and Dame Margaret kneeled to me,
And on my head did set the diadem." (1.2.36-40)

Although this dream seems to bode well for the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester, Humphrey recognizes it for what it is: a statement of Eleanor's own dissatisfaction and ambition. He upbraids her for speaking the dream, accusing her of "hammering treachery" and warning that she will "tumble down . . . [her] husband and . . . [herself]" (1.2.47-48). Indeed, just as Gloucester predicts, through the course of the play Eleanor's ambition and her association with witchcraft are instruments used by Gloucester's enemies to bring him to ruin. Here we see that because of female ambition, even a woman's dream of good for herself and her husband is actually a precursor to a man's downfall, just as Eve's ambition was the precursor to the general Fall of Man.

Far outpacing Eleanor in terms of ambition, Lady Macbeth is the most direct and culpable agent of her husband's destruction portrayed in Shakespeare's plays, and she, too, is a dreamer. Lady Macbeth's dreaming, however, occurs after the events leading to Macbeth's complete ruin are well underway, and her dream reveals her own guilt and anguish rather than

¹⁵⁶ Manfred Weidhorn, "The Literary Debate on the Dream Problem," *Milton Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (1971): 27.

foretelling her husband's doom.¹⁵⁷ In the sleepwalking scene Lady Macbeth rehearses the various atrocities committed by Macbeth and her own encouraging and advising role in them:

“. . . One, two: why then 'tis time to do't. Hell is murky. --Fie, my Lord, fie! a soldier and afeared? --What need we fear who know it, when none can call our power to accompt? . . . No more o'that, my Lord, no more o'that: you mar all with this starting. . . . Wash your hands, put on your night-gown; look not so pale. -- I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried: he cannot come out on's grave.” (5.1.36-40, 45-46, and 64-65)

Here Lady Macbeth dramatically relives her part in the tragedy that is overtaking her husband and the kingdom, rehearsing in fragments both her manipulation of Macbeth before the murder of Duncan and her ensuing demands that he ignore or hide his own feelings of guilt. Aerol Arnold points out that the lack of chronological order in the dream and the scattered, repeated, references to Duncan's murder emphasize Lady Macbeth's personal and direct involvement in that murder.¹⁵⁸ In addition, the repetition of references to Duncan's murder emphasize Lady Macbeth's deliberate derision toward and pressure on the wavering man to commit regicide, forefronting her guilt for Macbeth's ruin. This recapitulation dream inextricably ties Lady Macbeth to the downfall of her husband.

Possibly the most transgressive of all early modern dramatic women dreamers, Vittoria in Webster's *The White Devil* engages in the most damning of all types of women's dreams, the false, manipulative dream report that ultimately leads a man to destruction. Even though it is a later text than the others examined here, the additional taint of fraud strongly connects Vittoria's dream to earlier, medieval anti-feminist associations between women, dreaming, and deception, and this taint is added to those connections between women, dreaming, and the destruction of men generally found in Renaissance dramatic texts that are also present in *The White Devil*. Married to the foolish, gullible Camillo, Vittoria desires and is desired by the also married Duke

¹⁵⁷ Aerol Arnold, "The Recapitulation Dream in *Richard III* and *Macbeth*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (1955): 51-62. Arnold notes Shakespeare's extension of the dream convention from prophesy to a structurally helpful review of the plot.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*: 60.

Act 5.¹⁶⁰ Vittoria's conniving and unscrupulous brother Flamineo witnesses this dream report and remarks on it in asides. When Vittoria notes that, although terrified, she could not pray, Flamineo comments, "No; the devil was in your dream" (1.2.257).¹⁶¹ At the completion of the dream report, Flamineo gives the damning revelation that the dream is a calculated lie: "Excellent devil! She hath taught him in a dream / To make away his duchess and her husband" (1.2.263-64). James Hirsch questions whether Flamineo's assertion really means that the dream is manufactured by Vittoria to manipulate her lover into committing murder, suggesting that as a wish fulfillment fantasy the dream might only indicate Vittoria's desire to have an affair with Brachanio.¹⁶² Such a reading seems forced at best because the subject matter of the dream involves both the danger that being with "yew / you," i.e. Brachanio, poses to Vittoria and the subsequent deaths of the two who threaten her. If it were only a wish fulfillment fantasy, Vittoria's dream would more aptly demonstrate her wish for Camillo and Isabella's deaths rather than her desire for Brachanio. Moreover, this reading does not take into account the traditional uses of dreams and visions in literature, and especially in Renaissance drama, as structural devices, and rather places the dream in an anachronistic, post-Freudian framework. Another clue to what this dream discloses about Vittoria is revealed in the play's ambiguous title. Just who or what constitutes the titular White Devil is a vexed question. Hirsch suggests possibilities including Vittoria, Brachanio, Francisco, Monticelso, and several others as potential candidates,

¹⁶⁰ Yew trees are traditionally associated with death and with graveyards. An interesting survey of the symbolic and folkloric associations of yew trees can be found in Ralph W. V. Elliott, "Runes, Yews, and Magic," *Speculum* 32, no. 2 (1957): 250-61.

¹⁶¹ The similarity here to Macbeth's inability to pray with Duncan's guards while he is murdering the king and to Claudius's ineffectual prayer in *Hamlet* indicates that Flamineo is correct; the devil, or at least the diabolical taint of murder, is part of Vittoria's dream.

¹⁶² James Hirsch, "Vittoria's Secret: Teaching Webster's *The White Devil* as a Tragedy of Inscrutability," in *Approaches to Teaching English Renaissance Drama*, ed. Karen Bamford and Alexander Leggatt (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2002), 76.

as well as the possibility that the title refers to any person who sees him or herself as “more sinned against than sinning.” Each of Hirsch’s suggestions has merit, as the epithet “devil” is applied to most of the characters in the play before all is said and done.¹⁶³ Susan H. McLeod, equally plausibly, suggests that the title indicates the primary theme of the play: “duality in the sense of duplicity (since ‘white devil’ could mean simply ‘hypocrite’), and in the sense of dialectical opposition.”¹⁶⁴ Another possibility, however, is found in the early modern belief that the devil often appeared as an angel of light in order to deceive Christians and draw them to destruction. Even the skeptic Thomas Nashe asserts that

It is not to be gainsaid but the devil can transform himself into an angel of light, appear in the day as well as in the night; but not in this subtle world of Christianity so usual as before. If he do, it is when men’s minds are extraordinarily thrown down with discontent, or inly terrified with some horrible concealed murder or other heinous crime close-smothered in secret.¹⁶⁵

Nashe acknowledges the power of the devil to disguise himself and to attack Christians through dreams, but he indicates that only Christians who have otherwise succumbed to sin are truly vulnerable. At the outset of the play, numerous characters can be understood to fit Nashe’s criteria for vulnerability to a visitation by the devil in disguise. Vittoria is unhappy in her marriage, as Brachanio is in his own; Camillo is dissatisfied with Vittoria; Flamineo resents his poverty; Cornelia is disappointed in her children; Lodovico is banished because he has “acted certain murders here in Rome / Bloody and full of horror” (1.1.31-32). Although the “white devil” of the title is hardly a direct representation of the concept Nashe is describing—as those devils whispering into the ears of sleepers, especially sleeping women, found in medieval dramas were—the titular “white devil” can be read as a sublimated version of this concept. Whether we choose with Flamineo to see Vittoria’s dream report as a false attempt to compel her lover to murder Camillo and Isabella or choose to see it as a “real” dream reflecting her subconscious

¹⁶³ Ibid., 77-78.

¹⁶⁴ Susan H. McLeod, “Duality in *The White Devil*,” *Studies in English Literature* 20, no. 2 (1980): 272.

¹⁶⁵ Nashe, 147-48.

desires, the dream is certainly diabolical in the behavior it incites. I argue, however, that Flamineo is correct and that at the outset of the play Vittoria is just as dissembling and rhetorically sophisticated as she reveals herself to be in the trial scene and, therefore, perfectly able and likely to manufacture a dream to manipulate her lover. Whenever she is called a devil, but especially when Brachiano calls Vittoria “the devil in crystal,” equating her with both the titular “white devil” and the devil in disguise as an angel of light, this identity coupled with her use of a false dream as a deceptive maneuver against Camillo and Isabella (and ultimately Brachanio) establishes Vittoria as an analogue to medieval portrayals of women receiving and passing on deceptive, diabolical dreams. Vittoria, however, both the receiver and the generator of the dream, bears a dual (or duplicitous) identity; she is both Vittoria, the vulnerable female dreamer, *and* the “white devil” imparting the deceptive and destructive dream (4.2.86).¹⁶⁶ The connection between a woman’s dream and harm to men is firmly in place the moment Vittoria utters her dream report, but that connection is intensified by her identification with the devil in angelic robes bringing evil dreams to Christians.

Eleanor, Lady Macbeth, and Vittoria all demonstrate a pervasive early modern connections among ambitious women, dreaming, and men’s destruction, but like the other instances in which misogyny and dream theory are enmeshed in Renaissance drama, the association becomes uncomfortable and inconsistent when examined closely. Eleanor’s ambitious dreaming, for example, may be one factor in the downfall of her husband, but is ameliorated by Gloucester’s rejection of her attempts to manipulate and persuade him to strive for a higher position. In terms of power over a man, Eleanor is no Eve, and Gloucester’s failure to act when warned of the treachery surrounding him is a far more direct cause of his demise than anything his wife has done or dreamed. Her dream, moreover, is of an indeterminable quality, for though it cannot be considered directly prophetic; neither can it be considered utterly

¹⁶⁶ In this respect, Vittoria has much in common with the Wife of Bath. See chapter 2.

meaningless because of the doctrine of contraries.¹⁶⁷ The instabilities inherent in the layering of anti-feminism and dream theory render any consistent understanding of this woman and her dream's meaning impossible.

Lady Macbeth, however, is successful in manipulating her husband to evil and ruin; if anything, she and the witches constitute the spectre of Eve writ large in this play. Nevertheless, Macbeth's vigorous and whole-hearted embrace of evil, and even of his own destruction, overshadow the guilt of Lady Macbeth. Because the play is brief enough that the audience should hardly need to be reminded in the sleepwalking scene of Lady Macbeth's instrumental role in the murder of Duncan, the fact that the reminder is provided simultaneously indicates the importance of her responsibility and emphasizes its minimization by Macbeth's subsequent actions. In addition, the nature of the dream is also questionable. While it is clearly a product of the workings of Lady Macbeth's waking mind and, thus, "idle froth," the dream is also in one tiny measure prophetic; for Lady Macbeth has one glimpse into her own future, and presumably that of her husband, when she utters the ominous line, "Hell is murky" (5.1.37).¹⁶⁸ Further, Paul H. Kocher has asserted that the reluctance of the doctor to treat or even comment on Lady Macbeth's dreams is based in the early modern conflict between religion and medicine and indicates that Shakespeare wanted his audience to accept the dream as devoid of any somatic cause and as a purely spiritual matter only resolvable through divine or supernatural intervention.¹⁶⁹ Lady Macbeth's dream, then, is even more indeterminate than most, possibly occupying many sites on the continuum from somatic to supernatural. Seminally guilty of her husband's fall and yet minimally responsible for his destruction, Lady Macbeth demonstrates the ambiguity of anti-feminism, just as her sleepwalking experience demonstrates the indeterminacy of dream theory. Taken together, Lady Macbeth and her dream disrupt

¹⁶⁷ This is the theory that prophetic dreams must be interpreted as opposite to what their content suggests.

¹⁶⁸ Arnold: 51.

¹⁶⁹ Paul H. Kocher, "Lady Macbeth and the Doctor," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (1954): 341-49.

Macbeth's apparent masculine monovocality because their combination magnifies its logical inconsistencies and contradictions in the text.

Unlike Lady Macbeth's responsibility for the demise of Macbeth, Vittoria's guilt rooted in the deceptive and manipulative nature of her dream report is never minimized in *The White Devil*, as even in the last scene of the drama she proves herself a continuing danger to man in her attempt to murder her brother Flamineo (who is also attempting to murder her). Her portrayal, nonetheless, somehow remains grand and powerful, especially as she answers her accusers in her trial scene. McLeod notes that although she is guilty "of much, certainly of intent if not of deed," Vittoria defends herself "so bravely and wittily against her powerful and corrupt accusers" that the audience cannot help sympathizing with her.¹⁷⁰ Similarly, Christina Luckyj notes that "Vittoria is invariably remembered in the theatre for her heroic posture--for 'something fine, proud, and wonderfully defiant.'"¹⁷¹ Vittoria is both evil and admirable, and thus she personifies the problematic duality and instability of early modern theories of women. She is an ambiguous signifier and is impossible to confine neatly within the borders of patriarchal discourse. Indeed, Luckyj asserts that by highlighting her own theatricality in her trial defense, Vittoria "reappropriates misogynist notions of feminine indeterminacy for her own ends."¹⁷² Because her dream is open to multiple readings, it too may demonstrate Vittoria's appropriation of anti-feminist associations between dreaming and women. Like Eleanor and Lady Macbeth, Vittoria's characterization ultimately disrupts the patriarchal narrative that she and her dream appear intended to maintain, and these disruptions are evidence of a discursive region in which women, dreaming, and power are not easily aligned with traditional anti-feminist portrayals.

¹⁷⁰ McLeod: 282.

¹⁷¹ Christina Luckyj, "Gender, Rhetoric, and Performance in *The White Devil*," in *Revenge Tragedy*, ed. Stevie Simkin (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 203.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 200.

3.5 Apotheosis and Destruction

Another variation on the connection between an ambitious woman's dream and a man's downfall occurs in *Antony and Cleopatra* when Cleopatra reports a dream *after* Antony's death. She begins her dream report to Dolabella with an acknowledgement of the unlikelihood that a man could take seriously the dream of a woman or boy, asserting that men like Dolabella "laugh when boys or women tell their dreams" (2.2.73). Foregrounding the disregard men have for women's dreams at the start, this dream report opens with the imbrication of misogyny and dream theory. The dream she then reports is a vision of Antony in the form of a god:

"I dreamt there was an emperor Antony.
O, such another sleep, that I might see
But such another man! . . .
His face was as the heavens, and therein stuck
A sun and moon which kept their course and lighted
The little O, the earth. . . .
His legs bestrid the ocean; his reared arm
Crested the world; his voice was propertied
As all the tuned spheres, and that to friends;
But when he meant to quail and shake the orb,
He was as rattling thunder. For his bounty,
There was no winter in't; an autumn it was
That grew the more by reaping. His delights
Were dolphin-like; they showed his back above
The element they lived in. In his livery
Walked crowns and crownets; realms and islands were
As plates dropped from his pocket. . . .
Think you there was or might be such a man
As this I dreamt of? . . .
.....
But if there be nor ever were one such
It's past the size of dreaming." (5.2.75-96)

Rather than foretelling his death, Cleopatra's dream of Antony's apotheosis emphasizes the depth of his fall, strongly connecting her dream, like the dreams of other ambitious women, to the losses of men. Moreover, this dream is both analeptically truth-bearing and easily disregarded by a man, demonstrating the magnification of the instabilities of dream theory when they are mapped onto misogyny. As a metaphor for the power Antony once held, Cleopatra's dream underscores all that his love for her has cost him and serves as a reminder of the ruin all men have suffered because of a woman. The anti-feminism that undercuts the value of

Cleopatra and the validity of her dream, however, is itself destabilized by the ambiguities inherent in early modern concepts of women. Whatever negative and harmful female characteristics Cleopatra may demonstrate, she is also a great and noble tragic heroine. Caesar, himself, acknowledges that “Bravest at the last, / She levelled at our purposes and, being royal, / Took her own way” (5.2.333-35). Much like Eve, Cleopatra is characterized in the play as both the best of women and an evil temptress. Moreover, for Shakespeare and his Christianized audience, when Cleopatra kills herself with an asp taken from a basket of figs and thus thwarts Caesar’s plans (though found in Plutarch and not originally a biblical allusion) would certainly invite comparison to Eve and the Fall narrative. The inclusion of a dream that metaphorically links this woman’s influence to the downfall of a once great man demonstrates yet again the association of women’s dreams with men’s destruction, yet Cleopatra also epitomizes the contradictions of the early modern understanding of women, thus undermining the anti-feminist discourse of patriarchy and revealing an opposing cultural language in which powerful femininity is desirable and women’s dreams make men gods.

3.6 Political Prophecy and Death

Women’s dreams that include political prophecy are a special class of revelatory dream depicted as particularly disastrous for the men who are their subjects. Sharon L. Jansen notes that this type of prophetic dream “flourished in England from early in the twelfth century until quite late in the seventeenth” among both women and men and tended to operate as “potent political propaganda.”¹⁷³ According to Diane Watt, “not all prophecy was oppositional or revolutionary, [but] those persecuted or oppressed, whatever their sex, rank, or education, could voice their dissatisfaction through this type of discourse.”¹⁷⁴ Thus, political prophecy, while not necessarily so, often would have been the discourse of the other, a type of feminized speech

¹⁷³ Sharon L. Jansen, *Dangerous Talk and Strange Behavior: Women and Popular Resistance to the Reforms of Henry VIII* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 64.

¹⁷⁴ Watt, *Secretaries of God*, 2.

representing a dangerous challenge to masculine power structures. In the fictionalized world of early modern drama, politically prophetic women's dreams and visions are regularly associated with the downfall powerful men; thus the potential challenge from both the woman and the feminized speech form are simultaneously discredited through the deployment of misogynistic conventions.

The drama *Sir Thomas More* interweaves the ruin of one of Henry VIII's greatest courtiers with the dreams of women, as both More's wife and daughter have dreams foreshadowing his impending death.¹⁷⁵ Lady More and her daughter Margaret Roper seem intended to be positive representations of women, as both are at times treated as trusted partners by their husbands. More's consultation with his wife on the seating of guests and of his reliance on her to entertain them in his absence in Act 4 indicates a measure of dependence on and respect for her that appears to exceed that demanded by her stereotypical gender role. A similar tone of respect and mutual dependence is established when Roper confides his concerns over his father-in-law's fate to his wife.¹⁷⁶ Nevertheless, numerous belittling statements made by More to or about Lady More reveal a persistent anti-feminism at work in the play. For example, More chides his wife for her distress over his fall from power by telling her, "Come, breed not female children in your eyes," thus associating the feminine with weakness (4.3). Later, he makes this comparison more explicit: "[W]hat! we are men: / Resign

¹⁷⁵ Although this drama is of uncertain authorship, the Project Gutenberg e-text attributes it to Shakespeare. *Sir Thomas More*, Project Gutenberg E-text of *Sir Thomas More* ascribed in part to Shakespeare, www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext98/1ws4710.txt [accessed May 2009]. Current scholarship suggests that Shakespeare can properly be credited with one scene, but no fewer than six hands are evident in the surviving manuscript. Stanley Wells, *Shakespeare and Company* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 115-17. Jonathan Bate, *The Genius of Shakespeare*, 10th Anniversary Edition ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 98.

¹⁷⁶ *Sir Thomas More*, 4.1 and 4.3. All subsequent references to this drama are taken from the *Project Gutenberg* edition and will be given parenthetically by act and scene number.

wet passion to these weaker eyes, / Which proves their sex, but grants it never more wise” (4.5). The additional association of femininity and foolishness here is echoed in another speech in which More berates Lady More for that stereotypical flaw in women of talking too much and mocks her feminine ignorance:

“I will not hear thee, wife;
The winding labyrinth of thy strange discourse
Will ne’er have end. Sit still; and, my good wife
Entreat thy tongue be still; or, credit me,
Thou shalt not understand a word we speak;
We’ll talk Latin.” (4.5)¹⁷⁷

Anti-feminism destabilizes the otherwise positive characterization of Lady More, rendering her a “good” woman, who is nevertheless deeply flawed—as all women must be. When Lady More and her daughter dream, then, the ambiguity of feminine characterization is mapped onto the inconsistencies of dream theory, and the resultant dreaming that links these women to More’s downfall, while appearing to maintain consistency with patriarchal anti-feminism, nonetheless reflects these instabilities.

Because each woman’s dream includes violent images of impending doom for Thomas More, this union of female dreaming and man’s downfall is imbued with a tone of terror.¹⁷⁸ Lady More begins her report with a reference to the uncertainty surrounding dream experiences, asking her son-in-law Roper whether one “may . . . credit dreams.” She then describes her dream to Roper:

“ . . . [T]onight I had the strangest dream
That ere my sleep was troubled with. Me thought twas night,
And that the king and queen went on the Thames

¹⁷⁷ The character More’s frequent disparagement of Lady More may seem odd to those who are aware of the historical More’s commitment to the education of his own daughters. As the character is consistently portrayed as fun-loving, mischievous, and witty, I can only assume that these statements are largely intended to be humor at the expense of women.

¹⁷⁸ More’s son-in-law Roper indicates that he also has been “troubled” in the night regarding More’s fate, but does not explicitly state that he has dreamed of his father-in-law.

In barges to hear music: my lord and I
Were in a little boat me thought . . .
We grappled to the barge that bare the king.
But after many pleasing voices spent
In that still moving music house, me thought
The violence of the stream did sever us
Quite from the golden fleet, and hurried us
Unto the bridge, which with unused horror
We entered at full tide: thence some slight shoot
Being carried by the waves, our boat stood still
Just opposite the Tower, and there it turned
And turned about, as when a whirlpool sucks
The circled waters: me thought that we both cried,
Till that we sunk: where arm in arm we died.” (4.3)

Lady More correctly and prophetically dreams of the political and religious maelstrom that will sweep her husband to his death and her to ruin. Notably, the evil presaged in this woman’s dream is also subtly linked to another woman, Anne Boleyn, in addition to the king. Margaret Roper’s dream of her father’s demise is more graphically violent than her mother’s. She tells her husband that she

“. . . saw him here in Chelsea Church,
Standing upon the roodloft, now defac’d;
And whilst he kneeled and prayed before the image,
It fell with him into the upper choir,
Where . . . [her] poor father lay all stained in blood.” (4.3)

The terrifying and foreboding dreams reported by each of these women are revelatory in the sense that they do portend the violent death Thomas More will soon face at the hands of Henry VIII; but, rather than offering helpful foreknowledge, they merely suggest More’s inescapable doom. In this way, prophetic dreaming by women is connected to man’s harm rather than to some helpful means of preventing evil or the attainment of good, as Thomas Hill’s works assert such dreams should.

Although the language of patriarchy appears to override positive aspects of the portrayals of Lady More and Margaret Roper, the smoothness of the integration of women’s dreams into the text is fissured by logical inconsistencies created at the intersection of the dualist discourses of dream theory and anti-feminism. Through the resulting gaps we can detect evidence of cultural heteroglossia where these discontinuities subtly resist overt anti-feminism.

For example, because neither woman's dream accurately, even if dreamily, predicts the nature of More's demise, and because neither the women nor Roper know whether to "credit" the dreams at all, a certain degree of awkwardness attends their inclusion in the play. If the dreams are intended as foreshadowing, their content is misleading and contradictory. If they are intended to add an uncanny, fatalistic tone to the outcome of the drama, questions regarding the validity of dreaming undercut this usage, for the women and Roper do not seem to know what to make of the dreams any more than More seems to know whether his wife is a strong, stable partner or a silly, emotional prattler. The women are "good" but badly flawed; their dreams are prescient but so inaccurate as to be easily dismissable as "bubbling scum;" any attempt to impose meaning on the episode reveals that both the dreams and the women are in constant flux between one signifying position and another. The difficulties found in the fusion of anti-feminism and dream theory here can, of course, easily be written off as meaningless because this text comes to us as a single, jumbled manuscript of a somewhat poorly written, episodic collaboration. However, these difficulties also demonstrate the contradictions and inconsistencies that result from combining unstable discourses, and a gap between the smooth façade of anti-feminism that would associate women dreams with men's harm to deny the possibility of female access to positive, significant dreaming and the logical unsupportability of this characterization reveals the possibility that women's dreams and men's destruction are not naturally linked. Thus, the foreclosure of feminine access to beneficial dreaming in the text is incomplete, and a discursive allowance for positive women's dreaming presents itself, however faintly.

Like Lady More and Margaret Roper, a number of women in Shakespeare's dramas dream of death or destruction coming to their politically powerful husbands or lovers.¹⁷⁹ In

¹⁷⁹ It is, of course, true that many men in Shakespeare's works also dream of death and destruction coming to a man or men, whether it be to themselves or someone else. Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, in *Henry VI, Part 2*, for example, dreams that his staff is broken and the heads of his enemies are placed on

Troilus and Cressida, for example, Andromache futilely begs Hector on the day of his death not to go out and fight because she has “. . . dreamt / Of bloody turbulence, and this whole night / Hath nothing been but shapes and forms of slaughter” (5.3.10-12). Cassandra adds her own warning to Andromache’s foreboding dream; and, although it is no surprise that his sister’s prophecy fails to sway Hector from his purpose, his failure to listen when his wife’s dreams are supported by Priam indicates the strength of the anti-feminist denial of meaningful dreaming to women. In addition to Cassandra’s warning, Priam’s entreaty to Hector includes not one woman’s dream as ominous evidence, but two:

“Thy wife hath dreamt, thy mother hath had visions,
Cassandra doth foresee, and I myself
Am like a prophet suddenly enrapt
To tell thee this day is ominous.” (5.3.63-66)

Unwilling to believe any woman’s dream or vision, Hector ignores his father’s prophecy as well. Ultimately, Hector claims to be offended by Andromache and dismisses her from his presence. Troilus then speaks the dominant masculine view that “This foolish, dreaming, superstitious girl / Makes all these bodements” (5.3.78-79). Troilus openly dismisses the prophetic dreams at least partly on the basis of misogynistic characterization of women as foolish, superstitious, and childish.

As in *Sir Thomas More*, the overlapping of anti-feminism and dreaming results in a series of theoretical contradictions. Both Andromache’s and Hecuba’s dream experiences are truth-bearing, as both indicate a bad outcome to the day for Hector; however, neither is given in

it. Gloucester’s passivity in the face of warnings along with the rather obvious broken staff are decidedly unmanly, and his dream of his own downfall and that of his enemies is a futile, but portentous link between feminization and a man’s fall. It is beyond the purview of the current project to examine these various men’s dreams in detail, but in another setting I intend to argue that such dreams come to men who are feminized by either passivity or imminent subjection to a “real” man. In short, I claim that feminized men dream in much the same negative way that women do in Renaissance texts, and that positive types of significant dreams are only experience by “manly” men.

sufficient detail to offer the sort of direct aid that a warning dream like that Thomas Hill describes ought to provide. Moreover, as the dreams of women, they are as easily dismissed as the women who experience them, and Troilus openly voices the misogyny that attends Hector's refusal to believe the dreams of the women. Priam's belief in the prophetic value of the dream, however, highlights the aporia that attends dreaming and visions alongside the cultural potential to acknowledge the feminine voices. The inconsistency revealed in Hector and Troilus's anti-feminist inability to credit either Andromache or their mother with access to truth-bearing dreams and visions coupled with their father's belief in the veracity of the women's experiences clearly demonstrates the problematic overlay of dream theory on misogyny as well as the presence of competing cultural languages. The connection between the dreams of Andromache and Hecuba with Hector's death perpetuates the foreclosure of feminine access to positive prophetic dreaming, thus demonstrating the continued dominance of anti-feminist discourse, but heteroglossia remains detectable because the dreams are, in fact, truth-bearing. The resulting irony is that had Hector credited the women's dreams, he could have avoided death. The women's dreams are associated with the man's destruction, but only through the operation of anti-feminist discourse that infantilizes and belittles the women themselves. This ironic discontinuity reveals the presence of an alternative cultural language in which women do have access to significant dreams that could help rather than harm men.

The portrayal of Calphurnia in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* offers an example of a wife dreaming truthfully and in detail of powerful leader's violent downfall as did Lady More and Margaret Roper. Through this example we can see that a similar but more artfully constructed fusion of these two cultural languages than that found in *Sir Thomas More* and *Troilus and Cressida* still reveals significant fissures in the apparent monovocality of patriarchal hegemony produced by masculine texts. On the night before Caesar's assassination, Calphurnia dreams prophetically of his murder, and the next morning Caesar recounts her dream to Decius Brutus as his reason for not attending the Senate that day:

“She dreamt tonight she saw my statue,
Which, like a fountain with an hundred spouts,
Did run pure blood; and many lusty Romans
Came smiling and did bathe their hands in it.” (2.2.76-79)

This dream is much more detailed and specific than Andromache and Hecuba’s were, and it is much more gracefully integrated into the drama than were those of Lady More and Margaret Roper. It is, of course, a truth-bearing dream, and its content corresponds to the manner of death Caesar will face in addition to calling attention to a thematic issue of identity in the play. As in *Sir Thomas More* and *Troilus and Cressida*, allowance is given here to the concept that women can have access to revelatory dream experiences. However, Caesar ultimately dismisses his wife’s counsel and her dream with an abbreviation of the sort of anti-feminist disparagement that More and Troilus direct toward women, and the association of Calphurnia’s dream with a dire outcome for her husband unites women’s revelatory dreaming and “woe to man,” as it did in the prophetic dreams of Lady More, Margaret Roper, Andromache, and Hecuba. Because the two discourses, dream theory and misogyny, drawn on in this passage are ambiguous, though, the discontinuity of this alignment is easy to discern.

The portent of Calphurnia’s dream is, of course, found in *Plutarch’s Lives*, but its content in Shakespeare’s drama is not, as no bleeding statue appears in Plutarch’s account of the dream.¹⁸⁰ Cynthia Marshall demonstrates the thematic importance of Shakespeare’s use of a bleeding monument as a symbol of Caesar’s “problematic identity” of public icon and vulnerable human.¹⁸¹ I argue that this problem of identity extends to both the dream and Calphurnia. While Calphurnia’s dream does in fact truthfully prophesy Caesar’s destruction, as a dream it cannot be other than an ambiguous signifier open to misinterpretation by Decius as a

¹⁸⁰ Plutarch, “Plutarch’s Lives,” ed. A. H. Clough (Project Gutenberg, 1996).

www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext96/plivs10.txt [accessed 01/06/09].

¹⁸¹ Cynthia Marshall, “Portia’s Wound, Calphurnia’s Dream: Reading Character in Julius Caesar,” *English Literary Renaissance* 24, no. 2 (1994): 483. Here Marshall also notes the “effacement” of Calphurnia accomplished by denying her the “articulation of her [own] dream.”

assessment may be in terms of the *audience's* understanding, the uncertainty of the *characters* with regard to the questionable validity of both dreams and other omens, as well as the indeterminability of their meanings, is also established by this time as an internal convention in the play. Garber notes that we are told that Caesar "is superstitious grown of late, / Quite from the main opinion he held once of fantasy, of dreams, and ceremonies" but that he rejects the warning of the soothsayer with the scornful dismissal, "he is a dreamer, let us leave him" (2.1.194-96, 1.2.24).¹⁸³ This sort of contradiction indicates instability in the characters' attention to the possible veracity and meaning of dreams and dreaming that undermines Garber's assertion that early in the play everyone understands that dreams are significant and that their messages must be heeded. I claim that without drawing on the ambiguities present in the cultural languages of dream theory and misogyny, Decius could not manipulate Caesar as he does in his deliberate misinterpretation of Calphurnia's dream. Taking advantage of these ambiguities, he convinces Caesar to disregard the proper interpretation of the dream as well as the correct misgivings of the woman. The passage ends with Caesar's disastrous statement of dismissal:

"How foolish do your fears seem now, Calphurnia!
I am ashamed I did yield to them.
Give me my robe, for I will go." (2.2.105-07)

By layering the instabilities in the languages regarding the nature of woman and the nature of dreams, Decius gains the rhetorical power he needs to draw Caesar to his ruin. In addition, through this layering, Calphurnia is attached to Caesar's murder by both her dream content and her inability as a woman to convince him that her advice is not foolish.

The gaps, or perhaps chasms, marring this particular synthesis of dream theory and anti-feminism operate similarly to that we have seen in *Troilus and Cressida*. Deliberate ironies created by the actual truth of Calphurnia's dream, the anti-feminism attending its dismissal, and the alternate outcome that could have been achieved if Caesar had rejected Decius's

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 51.

deployment of misogynistic discourse produce a gap in the logic of the text through which we detect a discourse where the benefits of women's access to authoritative dreaming competes with the overt anti-feminism of associating women's dreams to men's woe. Although early modern views insist that women as a whole cannot be trusted and must obediently allow themselves to be directed by a man, Calphurnia does know the truth and could direct Caesar to his benefit; and, although dreams are ambiguous and difficult to interpret, it is the woman, rather than the man, who correctly reads the dream.¹⁸⁴ The negative association between women and dreaming arising from the harm prophesied to Caesar in Calphurnia's dream would not have been erased by Caesar's heeding the message, but its materialization on the "real" body of Caesar is only made possible by Decius's deployment of the instabilities of the cultural languages of dreaming and misogyny.

3.7 Conclusion

Wherever the discourses of women and dreaming intersect in these masculine texts, we can see the hegemony of patriarchal attitudes in the association of women with "woe to man." The tight connection of women to deception through fictionalized depictions of dreaming women in texts of the Middle Ages is not entirely absent from these early modern texts, but has been superseded in emphasis by a pervasive association of women's dreams with the destruction of men. Where the earlier texts tended to deny the access of women to the truth-bearing dream and its potential authorization of feminine speech, these later texts allow women's access to revelatory dreaming, but the doom-filled revelations and truth that women's dreams are granted reinforce the misogynistic conception that women bring harm to men. In the case of political prophecies, moreover, this association extends from the women themselves to

¹⁸⁴ Garber points out the additional irony that, by inciting the crowd against the conspirators with his oration over Caesar's bloody corpse, Antony causes Decius's calculated misconstrual of this dream to come true (56).

the feminized speech of any marginalized group that might attempt to challenge established hierarchies of society.

The effect of both versions of the narrative is, however, the same: any authorizing power that a divine or significant dream might impart to a woman is suppressed, and masculine authority is maintained at the expense of feminine authority or power. The cultural differences between fictionalized texts of women dreaming in the Middle Ages and fictionalized texts of women dreaming in the Renaissance are, indeed, much less significant than the hard division often imagined to have existed between these periods would suggest. Both groups of texts rely on the same dualistic traditions of dream theory, which attempt to divide dreams of the body from dreams of spiritual significance, with only slight changes in emphasis; and both groups of texts rely on the same equally dualistic misogynistic views of women largely based on teachings of the church regarding Eve's inferior, bodily creation and her responsibility for the Fall. Through the cracks in this façade of monologic, patriarchal discourse opened up by the ambiguities of dream theory and theories of women, we can perceive in texts of both periods that other languages, discourses offering a different understand of women and their dreams, were also at work in the cultures of both medieval and early modern England. It may not surprise us to find that men's fictional representations of dreaming women uphold patriarchy while suppressing feminine agency, but as powerfully as this paradigm dominated the literary landscape of pre-modern English literature, another model, one allowing for feminine authority and power, also appears in texts of the period.

CHAPTER 4

REAL WOMEN, DREAMS, AND COOPERATING DISCOURSES

4.1 Introduction

The anti-feminism that permeates masculine depictions of women's dreams throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance depends heavily upon the body/spirit dualism inherent to masculine discourse on women and to dream theories. Defining woman as body rather than spirit and insisting that as daughters of Eve all women share the defects and weakness of their general mother, misogynistic patristic writings passed essentially unaltered from century to century, in spite of the challenges to this paradigm posed by Christian doctrines of spiritual gender equality and by both legendary and living women who defied these stereotypes. More apt to acknowledge their own contradictions, dream theories over the centuries consistently struggled with the problem of distinguishing the many dreams that were products entirely of the body from others believed to be spiritual in nature and, perhaps more distressingly, between the divine or diabolical origins of dreams and visions. In spite of attempts by masculine texts to produce a seamless anti-feminist effect by associating women's dreams and visions with deception, evil, and deleterious effects on men, the discontinuities at the intersection of these two unstable discourses create gaps through which we detect the presence of multiple cultural languages and evidence of discursive complexity rather than the smooth façade of patriarchy.

Unlike their fictionalized counterparts, the dreams and visions of real women provide a space for the discursive ambiguities of dream theory and theories of women to cooperate with masculine hegemonic discourse, and this cooperation is accomplished by a monistic joining of the female body to the spiritual power and authority of dreams and visions.¹⁸⁵ This unification

¹⁸⁵ The word "real" here is, I recognize, deeply problematic. Cleopatra, for example, is a historically attested person, but the character constructed in Shakespeare is clearly a fiction. The abbess Hild,

allows feminine agency to coexist with masculine cultural dominance. Because reports of the dreams and visions of real women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance do not tend to follow the general patterns established in fictionalized portrayals of women's dreams in masculine texts but instead tend to empower women through divine access by way of the oneiric portal, then, these texts negotiate body/spirit dualism differently than do fictionalized dreams of women from masculine texts. I argue that this difference is a form of discursive cooperation in which the ambiguities and contradictions of dream theories and theories about the nature of women collaborate rather than contend. Rather than forcing women and significant dreams into a contentious body/spirit dichotomy that attempts to deny woman as body access to spiritual authority in the form of dreams and visions, these reports affirm masculinist discursive constructions of woman as body but also assert her spirituality and her consequent ability to derive and exercise the power of divine inspiration through dreams and visions. This monistic unification of woman, spirituality, and dream-vision authority does not challenge general masculine hegemony but instead operates in cooperation with and often in support of masculinist systems. Thus a polyvocal effect in which the discourse of masculine hegemony still dominates, but discourse allowing for feminine materiality, spirituality, sanctity, and power operates openly, as well.¹⁸⁶

similarly, is historically attested, but the person named Hild in Bede's text, while certainly a construction, is not a fiction in the same way that Shakespeare's Cleopatra is. Moreover, one can hardly determine whether a historically attested person like Christina of Markyate, who is certainly a construction in the hagiographic tradition, should be put into the same category with either Hild or Cleopatra. The four women I call "real" here, then, are real in the sense that the texts in which they appear assume them to be real persons who lived real lives and whose real experiences are recounted by the text. Whatever skepticism I have regarding their textually constructed natures, their texts treat them as real in ways that works offering fictionalized accounts of "real" women like Cleopatra and Dido do not.

¹⁸⁶ This is not to say that all reports of real women's dreams operated in this way. Carole Levin notes, for example, that during the Renaissance many believed that witches could attack sleeping people by sending

For both the medieval and early modern periods, mystical, religious, and hagiographic literature offer copious accounts of dreams and visions experienced by real women, although scholars and critics disagree over whether such texts actually represent women's voices and agency. Recent attempts to recover those texts that may be characterized as "women's writing," especially with regard to the Middle Ages, have given rise to a significant variety of scholarly opinions. A view held by some argues that the strength of patriarchal discourse and praxis, even the fact that the majority of scribes were men, effectively silenced women, and that texts purporting to include the voices and experiences of real women are, in fact, masculine texts demonstrating the pernicious tendency of patriarchy to erase female voices and to appropriate, or even colonize, women's words and experiences in the service of masculine domination.¹⁸⁷ Others conclude that in spite of their oppression women found subversive ways of using masculine discourse and practices to resist hegemonic culture.¹⁸⁸ Many, of course, express views that fall somewhere between these two poles and frequently attempt to demonstrate the presence of women's voices beneath the surface of the masculinist literary and historical record, much as I have done in previous chapters.¹⁸⁹ With regard to reports of real women's

them evil dreams. Moreover, the dreams of the witches, themselves, were opportunities to commune with demons, as their dreams might provide the women with information from the devil and access to their familiars. She asserts that when they were on trial, accused witches were sometimes deprived of sleep in an effort to protect their guards from danger. Levin, 86-91.

¹⁸⁷ Laurie Finke attributes this idea in part to conventional historical assumptions made regarding the Middle Ages as monoliths of masculine hegemony. Laurie A. Finke, *Women's Writing in English: Medieval England* (New York: Longman, 1999), 1-3.

¹⁸⁸ See, for example, Chance, *The Literary Subversions of Medieval Women*, 1-22.

¹⁸⁹ Finke challenges assumptions that patriarchal discourse silenced women in the Middle Ages and avers that women "participated fully, if not equally, in the making of their cultures" (3). Finke views the interaction between cultural languages of anti-feminism and feminine resistance in a more confrontational light than I do; however, I agree with her assertion that even when a text is the product of the dominant system,

dreams and visions, I argue that these texts do, in fact, offer evidence of real women's voices and that their exploitation of the ambiguities of dream theory and theories of women unveils a discursive space between oppressive codes regulating women and masculinist philosophical and theological naturalizations of anti-feminism.¹⁹⁰ Through this discursive gap, female authority and agency operate openly within the very systems that theoretically deny such a possibility. Because the discourses on dreaming and women remain largely unchanged from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, this space remains essentially intact over time, although minor alterations are detectable depending on the genre or goal of the text. Texts reporting real women's dreams, then, manifest the cooperation between female visionary authority and masculine hegemony for both public and personal purposes, while different interests and aims produce variations in the use-value of women's visionary authority and, consequently, in the presentation of that authority.¹⁹¹ Rather than offer a set of periodicized readings of texts in which real women's dreams are reported, in this chapter I offer readings of representative texts from across the pre-modern period where cooperation between the discourse of dreams and visions and masculine discourse on women attempts to advance historical, hagiographic, personal, and political agendas.

multiple discourses operate within and through it. For Finke's more oppositional characterization of polyvocality in medieval texts, see the introduction to Finke, *Women's Writing in English: Medieval England*.

¹⁹⁰ See Chapter 1 for the Foucauldian basis for this claim.

¹⁹¹ Bran Gastle's argument for the presence of feminine mercantile authority that is a cooperative or, perhaps, a negotiation of power is not unlike the discursive cooperation I propose. He argues against a "holistic" or "reductive" paradigm and in favor of a more complex critique of masculine/feminine power relations. Brian W. Gastle, "Breaking the Stained Glass Ceiling: Mercantile Authority, Margaret Paston, and Margery Kempe," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 36, no. 1 (2003): 143.

4.2 Hild, History, and the Authority of Women's Dreams

Although the now canonical English mystics Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe might seem to provide the most obvious starting point for an examination of the dreams and visions of real women of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, I find that the association of real women's dream reports with feminine agency actually begins earlier in English literary history.¹⁹² The Venerable Bede's history of the English church is, among other things, an attempt to situate the late-coming, out-lying English firmly within the culture of Christendom that dominated the Western world.¹⁹³ As such, the text served political, national, and historical ends; and, although the ninth-century translation into Old English omitted many details, it continued to define English identity through the church.¹⁹⁴ In both the Latin and Old English texts, the authorizing potential of dreams for women plays an important role in the account of Abbess

¹⁹² I will discuss Margery Kempe as a visionary later in this chapter, but I am painfully aware that my decision to omit Julian of Norwich borders on literary heresy. My choice has, however, not been made without careful consideration. Though there is little doubt that Julian was a real historical person, the dearth of information on her actual lived experience makes the information we have for Hild, for example, appear copious by comparison. While Julian relies on the authority of visionary experiences and makes deprecating references to her femininity, she also strives toward a personal goal "to write herself out of her text," and she almost completely accomplishes this aim. Alexandra Barrett, *Women's Writing in Middle English* (New York: Longman, 1992), 10.

¹⁹³ For a discussion of the importance of place to identity in Christendom, see Nicholas Howe, "From Bede's World To "Bede's World"," in *Reading Medieval Culture: Essays in Honor of Robert W. Hanning*, ed. Robert M. Stein and Sandra Pierson Prior (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

¹⁹⁴ Donald Scragg, "Source Study," in *Readings in Old English Texts*, ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 47; Dorothy Whitelock, "The Old English Bede," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48 (1962). See especially Whitlock's discussion of the title change made by the translator (62).

Hild, whom Bede describes as one of the most influential women of the early English church.¹⁹⁵ Although Bede does not report a specific dream experienced by Hild, herself, her life and death are both given significance through the dreams of women.

Hild is first mentioned in Book 3 as the Abbess of Heruteu, to which King Oswy sends his infant daughter Aelfled as fulfillment of a pledge to God.¹⁹⁶ Bede notes that two years later Hild acquires land to establish an abbey at Streanaeshalch, also known as Whitby, and it is here that Hild acts as hostess to the kings and bishops who comprise the Synod of Whitby. This group was gathered to judge whether to follow the Irish or the Roman Catholic dating of Easter along with other disputes over church discipline, and although this squabble over dates and minor issues of church governance might strike some as inconsequential, the determination made by the synod to follow the Roman Catholic tradition was vital to establishing the English church as a part of Roman Christendom. That Hild was chosen to host the event speaks volumes about her importance as a church authority, and the implied reason for her selection lies in Bede's note that the abbess was "a woman devoted to God."¹⁹⁷ Nancy Bauer rightly

¹⁹⁵ Bede, *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. Thomas Miller, 2 vols. (London: Adamant Media Corporation, 2006). Any Old English quotations and translations are from this edition. Reference to and quotes regarding events not included in the Old English translation are taken from Leo Shirley-Price's translation of the Latin text. While I find evidence of Bede's genuine appreciation of Hild in these texts, others interpret them quite differently. Stephanie Hollis, for example, contends that "the admiration that some readers have seen reflected in Bede's portrait of Hild is to a high degree their own." Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church: Sharing a Common Fate* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1992), 246.

¹⁹⁶ Bede, *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 237.

¹⁹⁷ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 187. My reading of this text disagrees sharply with that of Hollis as well as with that of Lees and Overing. Hollis sees Bede's omission of Hild's later letters to Rome opposing Wilfrid, who argued for the Romanization of the English church and against the position favored by Hild, as an erasure of her political power. I contend, however, that because the main thesis of

argues that Bede dignifies the English church before its Romanization by portraying Hild as devout and holy. Hild's preference for Irish Catholicism along with her role in training bishops for the Romanized church, however, demonstrate her liminality; she stands on the threshold between these two manifestations of Christianity in England and manages to be an effective leader in both. Thus Bede's positive treatment of Hild supports his project of aligning the English with the Roman church without denying the validity of the Irish Christianity that had been long established in England.¹⁹⁸

In Book 4 Bede gives Hild great credit for her influence and importance in the church, and here he connects the authority of the abbess to divine revelation through dreams. Bede begins his account of Hild's life at the point of her death but soon establishes her noble credentials by mentioning that she is niece of one king and aunt of another. He explains that she spent many years in secular life before deciding to enter a convent and that it is only the intervention of Bishop Aiden that prevents her from joining her sister in a French monastery. At this point in his narration of Hild's early life, Bede has connected the abbess to secular and clerical masculine power, and he continues her story with a description of Hild's authority and influence over men of the church, noting that

we gesawon æfter þon fiif biscopas, þa ðe of þam ilcan mynstre cwomon 7 þær

Bede's text is the integration of the English church into the history and culture of Roman Christendom, his elision of Hild's later opposition to Wilfrid, the representative of Roman Christianity, is intended to eliminate a potential embarrassment from his account of Hild's life. Lees and Overing assert that evidence of Bede suppression of Hild's political power is found in his omission of the Synod of Whitby in his account of her life, though he does include it earlier in the text. All of these scholars argue that Bede's account of Hild's life ensures the perpetuation of her sanctity as symbol for the religious community, i.e. men, "at the cost of obscuring the real conditions of her life (and death), or indeed those of Breogoswith's and Begu's" (Lees and Overing 24). Hollis, 255; Overing, 17-34.

¹⁹⁸ Nancy Bauer, "Abbess Hilda of Whitby: All Britian Was Lit by Her Splendor," *Medieval Women Monastics* (1996).

gelærde wæron: 7 þa wæron ealle micelre leornunge 7 halignesse weras. Þa wæron þus hatne 7 nemde, Bosa, Ætla, Offfor, Iohannes 7 Wilfrid.

(we subsequently have seen five bishops, who came from this monastery and had received instruction there: and these were all men of great learning and holiness. Their names are as follows: Bose, Etna, Offfor, John, and Wilfrid.)¹⁹⁹

According to Bede, these clerics have learned the virtues that make them fit for bishoprics from Hild herself; their ecclesiastical authority is the product of their submission to the influence and teaching of a woman. Emphasizing Hild's influence once again, Bede declares that "*fore arfæstnisse tacne 7 Godes gife gewindedan heo módor cégean 7 neman* (in token of her piety and God's favour, [Hild] was generally called by the name of mother)."²⁰⁰ Hild's character, like her deeds, demonstrates that she merits the ecclesiastical authority invested in her both before and after the Romanization of the English church.

The carefully crafted genealogy, history, and praise that Bede provides for Hild might have been enough to sanction her power in the English church if she had been a man; however, Bede cements Hild's right to clerical authority with accounts of women's dreams and visions.²⁰¹ On the night Hild dies, Begu, a nun in a far off monastery, experiences a vision in which

geseah heo openum eagum, þæs þe hire þuhte, of þæs huses hrófe úfan micel leoht cumin; 7 eal þæt hus gefylde. Þa heo þa in þæt leoht bihygdlice locade 7 hit georne beheold, þa geseah heo þære foresprecean Godes þeowe sawle Hilde þære abbudissan in þæm seolfan leoht, engla weorodum gelædendum to heofunum úp borene beon

(she saw with open eyes a great light come from the roof above: and it filled all that house. As she looked attentively at that light and regarded it earnestly, she saw the soul

¹⁹⁹ Bede, *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 334-335.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 336-337.

²⁰¹ Hollis notes that "evidence of divine sanction for a conversionary role appears to have been required chiefly by female saints"; Karkov argues, however, that visionary proof of sanctity was important regardless of gender. She asserts that Bede's account of Hild is like that of Aiden in its need to guarantee the holiness of the subject through the visions of others. Hollis, 253; Catherine E. Karkov, "Whitby, Jarrow, and the Commemoration of Death in Northumbria," in *Northumbria's Golden Age*, ed. Jane Hawkes and Susan Mills (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), 129.

of the aforesaid servant of God, the abbess Hild, borne up to heaven in this light and escorted by hosts of angels.)²⁰²

A similar vision is simultaneously experienced by a nun of Whitby. These well-timed, beatific visions are standard hagiographic fare, but their importance should not be discounted for that reason. In his description of the vision of Begu, Bede confirms her sanctity by asserting that she is holy and has been a virgin dedicated to God for over thirty years. He also calls attention to her physical body by pointing out that she is resting when the vision occurs, that she first hears a bell, and that she then opens her *physical* eyes to see the angels and Hild ascending to heaven. Her proven purity and piety along with her experience of a vision mark this nun as a spiritual being, but she is also marked as a body. Her vision and that of the nun of Whitby operate as proof of Hild's sanctity, already so decisively set forth in Bede's description of the abbess's life, and confirm that the power Hild wielded was divinely inspired and entirely appropriate, yet we are not permitted to forget that these visions amount to spiritual experiences originating in women's bodies. Bede's tale of the dream of Hild's mother makes this point much more dramatically. Having just asserted Hild's spiritual maternity, Bede turns immediately to the prophetic dream experienced by Hild's biological, therefore bodily, mother:

Wæs þæt eac gedefen, þætte þæt swefn gfyllled wære, þætte Breogoswið hire modor geseah on hire cildhade. Þa Hereric hire wer wracade under Cerdice Bretta cyninge, 7 þær wæs mid attre acweald, þa geseah heo þurh swefn, swa swa he semninga form hire ahefen 7 alæded wære. Þa sohte her hine mid ealre geornfulnessse 7 nænige swaðe his owern æteowdon. Þa heo hine ða bihygdlice 7 geornlice sohte, þa gemette heo seminga under hire hr ægle gyldne sigele swiðe deorwyrðe. Þa heo geornice heo sceawode 7 beheold, þa wæs heo gesegen mid swiðe micelre boerhtnesse leohtes scinan, þæt heo eal Breotene gemæro mid hire leohtesscinan gefylde.

(It was also proper that the dream should be fulfilled which her mother Breogoswith, saw in her daughter's childhood. When her husband, Hereric, was in exile under Cerdic, king of the Britons, and was there taken off by poison, she saw in a dream, as though he was suddenly lifted up and carried away from her. Then she sought him with all care and no trace of him appeared anywhere. And while she carefully and earnestly sought for him, suddenly she found under her robe a very precious golden necklace. Now when she looked at this and regarded it earnestly, it seemed to shine with great brightness of light, so that it filled all the borders of Britain with the rays of its light.)²⁰³

²⁰² Bede, *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 340-341.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 338-339.

This mother's dream, a *somnium*, prophesies Hild's note-worthy life and service to the church in a form that, like the visions of the nuns, is quite common in hagiography.²⁰⁴ As with the nuns' visions above, however, we should not dismiss Breogswith's dream as purely formulaic, for it also demonstrates a connection between the female body and divine revelation. As we know, according to the discourse of dream theory, Breogswith could not have been certain at the time she had the dream that it was, in fact, divine and prophetic, since the nature of such dreams can only be determined after the fact. Bede, however, writing retrospectively, is able to deploy all of the authority inherent in divinely inspired, prophetic dreams to justify Hild's clerical power. Moreover, Hild's extraordinary life functions as both the translation and the fulfillment of her mother's dream. Although Hild is an infant at the time, the parturition imagery of the jewel "under her robe" that Breogswith brings forth to light all Britain is unmistakable and demands that attention be paid to the corporeality of femininity; thus, Hild's just established spiritual maternity becomes imbricated in the physical maternity of Breogswith's dream image. This maternal corporeality, though, is cast in a positive light, for rather than Eve's curse, Breogswith's dream delivers a blessing that extends to the whole nation because the shining

²⁰⁴ Prophetic mother's dreams about their children predate the Christian era; Clytemnesta's dream of nursing serpents from Aeschylus's *Choephoroi*, for instance, prophesies her own death at the hands of her son Orestes. However, the model of the hagiographic mother dream is probably most closely connected to Monica's dream of Augustine from the *Confessions* 3.9.14. Moreira notes that the mother dream is a familiar trope of Merovingian hagiography and can either take the form of a prophetic dream similar to Breogswith's or an *oraculum* in which an angel reveals the auspicious future of the child to the mother (635). Hollis argues that the hagiographic mother vision "owes its currency to Gabriel's annunciation to the mother of Christ" (253). I contend, however, that while the annunciation is the premier model of birth prophecy available to Christians, as it is not a dream or a vision but rather an actual experience, it is a less appropriate model for the hagiographic trope than the dream of Monica. Hollis; Isabel Moreira, "Dreams and Divination in Early Medieval Canonical and Narrative Sources: The Question of Clerical Control," *The Catholic Historical Review* 89, no. 4 (2003).

necklace is a figure of Hild herself.²⁰⁵ As both the jewel and the translation of the dream, Hild *embodies* the divine authority always already present in a prophetic dream, but she does so through her sanctity and through spiritual motherhood. Thus, the mother's dream that authorizes Hild's spiritual power while maintaining the connection between the feminine and the body indirectly authorizes bishops, male spiritual leaders of the church, as well. In this case the authority transferred to the dreamer according to dream theory is likewise transferred to the subject of the dream through the mother/daughter relationship and through their shared corporeality. The misogynistic connection between the body and the daughters of Eve cooperates with the authorizing potential of dream discourse to produce a text validating the woman, the two manifestations of the English church that she bridges, and historic English identity as a Roman Catholic nation.

The cooperation of dream discourse and anti-feminist discourse in this historical account is made possible only because the ambiguities of both allow Bede to combine their positive aspects without negating the cultural power exercised by each discourse as a whole. Calling attention to parturition indicates Bede's acknowledgement of the patristic "truth" about women: that they are reproductive bodies under a curse. Bede is aware, and knows that his audience is aware, that Hild is a female body, but she is also one of exemplary spirituality. As such, she reifies the transcendence of her mother's prophetic dream; thus, Hild is a repository of both flesh and spirit, combining binaries into a monistic whole. Moreover, the visions experienced at Hild's death by other women (who do not appear to share her aristocratic origins or special holiness but, like Hild, are simultaneously female bodies and spiritual beings) confirm

²⁰⁵ Klein argues that the dream and the symbolic necklace are calculated to separate Hild's identity as abbess from "the material manifestations of her former secular status." She asserts that "the shining light of earthly riches is depicted as part of Hild's infancy and as wholly unnecessary to her later life, when she herself will become a living embodiment of a light so bright it can illuminate all of Britain." Klein does not address the image of parturition and maternity embedded in the dream. Klein, 50-51.

the abbess's sanctity while also demonstrating the potential *unremarkability* of Hild's female spirituality. Masculine hegemony is upheld. Hild, after all, can teach and guide bishops, although she can never be one, but female spirituality, purity, and power are also maintained in this historical account of a dreaming woman.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ I feel compelled to note that having delimited my project to English texts and lacking even a weak claim for including Rudolf of Fulda's Latin *Life* of the Anglo-Saxon St. Leoba, I am forced to omit this valuable text from my main discussion even though it provides an ideal example of the authorizing power of real women's dreams. Rudolf relates that Leoba's mother Aebba experiences a prophetic dream similar to that of Breogoswith. In this dream Aebba draws from her bosom a church bell that "rang merrily" (262). The dream is interpreted by Aebba's nurse, who explains that it signifies the coming birth of a daughter who is to be consecrated to God; consequently, as a young girl Leoba is handed over to Mother Tetta of Wimbourne and is raised in the double monastery there. As a young woman, Leoba dreams of a purple thread of enormous length issuing from her mouth, "as if it were coming from her very bowels" (263). An old nun interprets Leoba's *somnium* as a prophecy that Leoba's wisdom and good deeds will benefit people in far off lands. The fulfillment of the prophecy is Boniface's appointment of Leoba to the abbacy of Bischofsheim in Germany, where she lives an exemplary and miraculous life. The spiritual authorization provided by these dreams as well as the link to parturition in Aebba's dream and the vivid physicality of Leoba's dream of the thread coming from her bowels demonstrate the same sort of conflation of the spiritual and the corporeal that I detect in Bede's narrative of Hild. Some helpful resources for further study of Leoba as a woman dreamer include Rudolf of Fulda, "The Life of Saint Leoba," in *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints' Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Thomas Head and Thomas F. X. Noble (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995); Hollis; Janet L. Nelson, "Women and the Word in the Earlier Middle Ages," *Studies in Church History* 27 (1990). Also see Christine E. Fell, "Some Implications of the Boniface Correspondence," in *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, ed. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); William P. Hyland, "Prophecy and Community Leadership in Rudolph of Fulda's "Vita Leobae"," in *Prophet Margins: The Vatic Impulse in Medieval Literature*, ed. Edward Risdén (New York: Peter Lang, 2003); Barbara Yorke, "'Carriers of the Truth': Writing the Biographies of Anglo-Saxon Female Saints," in

4.3 Hagiography, Dream Authority, and Christina of Markyate

The unfinished *Life of Christina of Markyate* is a remarkable text in the hagiographic tradition that fairly teems with dreams and visions serving to authenticate both Christina's holiness and the authority she exercises, much as the dreams in Bede's narrative of Hild's life do for the abbess.²⁰⁷ The purpose of this text, however, is, neither historical nor overtly political; but, like most hagiography, it aims to establish formal recognition of the extraordinary sanctity of the subject and to associate the power of that sanctity to a particular site, in this case St. Albans, and those associated with it. Unlike most hagiographies, however, this text appears to have a third aim: that of providing a defense against gossip about Christina and her questionable associations with men, especially her long-term relationship with Geoffrey, abbot of Saint Albans, whom Christina instructed on how to run his monastery, on what services he might provide to King Stephen, and other matters of importance.²⁰⁸ In the Christian culture of

Writing Medieval Biography 750-1250: Essays in Honor of Professor Frank Barlow, ed. Julia Crick, Sarah Hamilton, and David Bates (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2006).

²⁰⁷ The historical person known as Christina of Markyate was originally named Theodora. The "Christina" in the *Life* is, of course, a textual construction, as is the "Theodora" of the *Life*. My topic is the manner in which dreams are used in the text to authorize the narrative construct "Christina," but it is vital to acknowledge that the narrative construct is made possible and necessitated by the power exercised by the historical individual, regardless of which name she used. For an argument against reading with the historical individual in mind, see Ruth Mazo Karras, "Friendship and Love in the Lives of Two Twelfth-Century English Saints," *Journal of Medieval History* 14 (1988): 313. For a discussion of the constructed nature of both "Christina" and "Theodora" in the text, see Nancy F. Partner, "Christina of Markyate and Theodora of Huntingdon," in *Reading Medieval Culture: Essays in Honor of Robert W. Manning*, ed. Robert M. Stein and Sandra Pierson Prior (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2005), 125.

²⁰⁸ Partner offers a fascinating argument regarding the nature of this text as a personal defense of Christina and Geoffrey's relationship. She observes that the "narrative-constructing pressures make this a

twelfth-century England, hagiography based on martyrdom at the hands of pagans was an impossibility that made alternate evidence of extraordinary sanctity necessary. Moreover, any defense of apparently unchaste behavior in a woman who lived for four years alone with one man and who clearly exercised great sexual power over many other men, clerical and lay, would have to be based in transcendent evidence to be even marginally credible. Hence, we find the authorizing power of dreams doing double duty in the *Life of Christina of Markyate*. Therefore, unlike Hild, Christina actually experiences a majority of the dreams and visions that appear in the text of her life, and she also seems to possess the power to influence the dreams sent by divine or diabolical forces to others.

Composed during her lifetime by someone who knew her well, this text neither suffers from the temporal distance nor bears the grand historical weight of Bede's account of Hild.²⁰⁹ The writer of Christina's life has first-hand experience with her, a direct account of her life from her own lips, the opportunity to ask questions about her experiences and feelings, and access to others, such as her mother, who knew her well and were present for some of the narrated events.²¹⁰ The narratorial voice is not Christina's but rather that of a man writing her

rather odd book: something like a defense attorney's counter-attack awkwardly laminated to a hagiographer's celebration." Partner, 127-128.

²⁰⁹ Atkinson argues that the relative distance between hagiographer and subject in Christina's case was much larger than that between Anselm and his hagiographer, suggesting that their contact was less regular than others take it to have been. She feels that gender difference also distances Christina's hagiographer from his subject in significant ways. Clarissa Atkinson, "Authority, Virtue, and Vocation: The Implications of Gender in Two Twelfth-Century English Lives," in *Religion, Text, and Society in Medieval Spain and Northern Europe: Essays in Honor of J.N. Hillgarth*, ed. Mark D. Meyerson, Thomas E. Burman, and Leah Shopkow (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2002).

²¹⁰ The writer asserts, for example, that Christina's mother personally told him of the prenatal sign that the child was a chosen servant of God, that he is present when Christina's friend Helisen takes the veil, and that Christina "averred in my [the writer's] hearing" her intense desire to speak with the recluse Eadwin

hagiography; nevertheless, *The Life of Christina of Markyate* aptly demonstrates the power of discursive cooperation by making use of this generally masculinist genre while simultaneously deploying the power of dream discourse to authorize female authority.²¹¹ Working in conjunction with the discursive ambiguities of anti-feminist discourse, the discourse of dreaming validates Christina as a divinely inspired, feminine, spiritual power operating openly within, and perhaps even in the service of, a system of masculine hegemony.²¹² Although more than forty dreams and visionary experiences are recounted in the text, I will focus my analysis on a few specific instances to demonstrate the importance of the authority of dreaming, both where this authority is exercised and where it is withheld, and the effective cooperation between dream discourse and discourse on women in the text.

when she hoped he might be arranging help for her. C. H. Talbot, ed., *The Life of Christina of Markyate a Twelfth Century Recluse* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 35, 45, 87.

²¹¹ For another view on the male narrator/author see S. Elizabeth Passmore, "Painting Lions, Drawing Lines, Writing Lives: Male Authorship in the Lives of Christina of Markyate, Margery Kempe, and Margaret Paston," *Medieval Feminist Forum* 36 (2003).

²¹² Bynum argues that women who came into the church as adults tended to show a greater awareness of their inferior status and to be more male oriented. She asserts that most of Christina's "visions and prophecies were for the benefit of powerful males" (134-35). While I agree that Christina's visions and dreams tend to uphold the power of men, I argue that they also effectively serve to uphold her power over these same men. Caroline Walker Bynum, "Religious Women in the Later Middle Ages," in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. Jill Raitt (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1987). Diane Watt's suggestion that Geoffrey is the recipient of the single direct address found in the text, in which the writer avers to his reader that Christina "revered you more than all the pastors under Christ," seems highly plausible and indicates that Christina did demonstrate a high degree of respect for Geoffrey even as she exerted her influence over him. Diane Watt, *Medieval Women's Writing* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007), 34. The quote is found on page 127 in the *Life*.

Although both Diane Watt and Monica Furlong compare the first event narrated in Christina's *Life* to the prophetic dream of Hild's mother, the greater significance of the scenario lies in the fact that it denies access to the authority of dreams and visions to Christina's mother while preserving the hagiographic tradition of giving her prophetic knowledge of her child's future greatness.²¹³ We are told that Christina's mother Beatrix receives a sign that her daughter has been "chosen as a servant of God" when a dove flies from a nearby monastery, nestles in the sleeve of the pregnant Beatrix's tunic, and remains docile in her care for seven days.²¹⁴ While the writer clearly wishes the audience to understand that this event is prophetic, more striking is the fact that, in a text relying almost exclusively on dreams and visions to validate the sanctity of its subject, this event is *not* related as a dream or vision, but rather as an unusual and perhaps inspired natural phenomenon. This distinction is vital because the authorizing power of dreams and visions that will be deployed later in the work on Christina's behalf is emphatically not shared with Beatrix, who, unlike her visionary daughter, is depicted as anything but holy. In fact, Beatrix and Autti, Christina's father, not only demand that she give up the virginity that she has consecrated to God, but also resort to manipulation and abuse to force their will upon her. When the archbishop of Canterbury is told of the treatment Christina has endured from her mother, he dramatically avers, "If that accursed woman [Beatrix] by whose wiles the maiden, of whom we are speaking, was seduced into marrying, were to come to me in confession, I would impose on her the same penance as if she had committed manslaughter."²¹⁵ The nesting dove is a sign of Christina's future service to Christ, but it should not be interpreted in the same way that the dreams of Breogswith and other mothers of saints might be because of the absence of the authorizing power of significant dreaming. The authority

²¹³ Monica Furlong, *Visions and Longings: Medieval Women Mystics* (Boston: Shambhala, 1996), 68; Talbot, ed., 35; Watt, *Medieval Women's Writing*, 28.

²¹⁴ Talbot, ed., 35.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

of dreams and visions is reserved for Christina and the men she influences; it is not available to women in general.

In spite of her parents' selfish cruelty towards her, Christina remains committed to her childhood decision to remain a virgin and dedicate herself to God. Christina's devotion to her virginity is, of course, one of the standard tropes of hagiography, but the trope operates for women differently than it does for men. The deeply rooted discourse of misogyny, as we have seen, attributes insatiable sexual desire to women along with a tendency to sexual predation; thus, the devotion to virginity for a woman, especially an uncloistered one, insistently calls attention to the permeability of the female body, feminine sexuality, and the alluring dangers that women pose to men.²¹⁶ These dangers are also figured in the first great threat to Christina's virginity: an unsuccessful rape attempt by the Bishop Ralph of Durham. We are told that "the bishop gazed intently" at Christina, who is still a child, "and immediately Satan put it in his heart to desire her."²¹⁷ Here the familiar convention of misogynistic discourse that characterizes woman as an irresistible temptation to man and the instrument of the devil to lead him to sin is unmistakable, but the text also resists this discursive paradigm by placing the guilt in this instance squarely on the bishop:

When it was getting dark the bishop gave a secret sign to his servants and they left the room, leaving their master and Christina, that is to say, the wolf and the lamb in the same room. For shame! The shameless bishop took hold of Christina . . . and with that mouth which he used to consecrate the sacred species, he solicited her to commit a wicked deed.²¹⁸

The writer twice calls attention to the shame of this act, but that shame is entirely attributed to the bishop and not to his victim, the innocent lamb. Christina avoids this rape by outwitting the bishop, just as she later avoids marital consummation by reasoning with her husband Burthred

²¹⁶ Clarissa W. Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and the World of Margery Kempe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983). See chapter six, "A Maiden in thy Soul"(157-94).

²¹⁷ Talbot, ed., 41-43.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

and then by hiding from a mob sent to help him force her to give in.²¹⁹ We may observe that in these three instances, where no dreaming is involved, we see discursive competition rather than discursive cooperation in the resistance of the text to the misogynistic stereotype it deploys. In these accounts, though she has devoted herself to Christ, Christina is still a tempting beauty who must rely on her own wits and power to avoid sexual violation. Her purity is only maintained by ordinary means available to any virgin, rather than through the miracles we would expect in the life of a saint. The misogynistic paradigm that posits all women in the position of seductress is in force, although resistance to this discourse in the form of Christina's will to purity is also at play.

On the third attempt Burthred makes to consummate their marriage, the discourse of dreaming begins, and discursive cooperation emerges. We are told that one night earlier Christina had dreamt of "a devil of horrible appearance with blackened teeth who was unavailingly trying to sieze her, because in her flight she had sprung at one leap over a high fence."²²⁰ When she subsequently does elude Burthred by leaping a fence, the dream is proven prophetic. Because the credit for guarding her vow is given to Christ rather than to Christina, Christina's body is spared by divine rather than human power. Here Christina's access to a prophetic dream confirms her spirituality; thus the misogyny that demands a continual performance of holiness through Christina's own repeated efforts to preserve her purity is inverted: her virgin body is now protected by Christ *because* of her holiness. A recursion of sorts, then, is generated by cooperation between discourses: while access to a prophetic

²¹⁹ Burthred's legal status in relation to Theodora/Christina at this point is vexed on several levels. The two are betrothed and thus legally married, but the marriage has neither been officially celebrated nor consummated. In Christina's mind, however, both betrothal and marriage are false, as she considers herself the spouse of Christ and believes her consent was coerced and therefore invalid. For a complete discussion of the legalities and complications of this situation, see Thomas Head, "The Marriages of Christina of Markyate," *Viator* 21 (1990).

²²⁰ Talbot, ed., 53-55.

somnium elevates Christina to the status of a spiritual being, it simultaneously emphasizes her corporeality by preserving her virginity through miraculous power, and this physical preservation embodies her essential spirituality. Although at this point in the narrative Christina has no clerical power, the discursive cooperation present in this first dream-miracle authorizes the exercise of her will at the expense of the desires of her parents and husband while also demonstrating her potential saintliness and providing a foundation for future authorization through the power of her dreams and visions.

Eventually Christina flees her parents' home and hides with various religious recluses so that she may more easily defend her virginity, although she does not take the veil and enter religious life herself for some time. Nancy F. Partner ably demonstrates the troubling eccentricity of Christina's insistence on remaining chaste without committing herself to a religious order that would both authorize and defend her choice.²²¹ Without the authority of religious orders to validate Christina's continued chastity, the writer of her *Life* must depend instead on numerous reports of dreams and visions that bring divine sanction to Christina's unconventional behavior. During this period, and especially during the four years she spends alone with the hermit Roger, the discursive authority of Christina's dreams and visions is supplemented through deployment of anti-feminist discourse in the form of Christina's miraculous control of her unruly female body. In a much-quoted passage, the writer informs us that

Near the chapel of the old man and joined to his cell was a room which made an angle where it joined. This had a plank of wood placed before it and was so concealed that to anyone looking from outside it would seem that no one was present within, since the space was not bigger than a span and a half. In this prison, therefore, Roger placed his happy companion. In front of the door he rolled a heavy log of wood, the weight of which was actually so great that it could not be put in its place or taken away by the recluse. And so, thus confined, the handmaid of Christ sat on a hard stone until Roger's death, that is four years and more, concealed even from those who dwelt together with Roger. O what trials she had to bear of cold and heat, hunger and thirst, daily fasting! The confined space would not allow her to wear even the necessary clothing when she was cold. The airless little enclosure became stifling when she was hot. Through long

²²¹ Partner.

fasting, her bowels became contracted and dried up. There was a time when her burning thirst caused little clots of blood to bubble up from her nostrils. But what was more unbearable than all this was that she could not go out until evening to satisfy the demands of nature. Even when she was in dire need, she could not open the door for herself, and Roger usually did not come till late.²²²

Christina's corporeality here could not be more pronounced, even though the point of the passage is her control over her physicality. Christina apparently still eats and eliminates, but natural function of the orifices of her body is disrupted – her bowels shrivel, her nose bubbles with blood, her mouth burns with thirst – through her utter commitment to enclosure, a symbol of her chastity. Here the text appears to attempt a demonstration of the way that Christina's devotion to purity erases her feminine bodily nature; nevertheless, because the attempt is built on accentuating her physicality, it instead serves to unify Christina's material body and her spirituality even though no dream is evident in this passage.

The account of Christina and her next keeper, however, dramatically combines dream discourse with discourse on women. After Roger's death the archbishop of York sends Christina to live with a cleric who is also a man of high position. At the instigation of the devil, Christina and the cleric develop a burning lust for one another. The cleric behaves abominably, appearing naked before her and pleading with her to have sex with him. Christina "manfully" resists "the desires of her flesh," and through fasting and scourging herself she "tamed her lascivious body" (115). Up to this point in the narrative, Christina's female body has figured prominently, but this passage draws even greater attention to the discourse of misogyny, as Christina becomes the temptress of the cleric, burns with the ravenous sexual desire that women are known for in this discursive paradigm, and can only resist the demands of her female body by becoming "manly" in her self-discipline. Not surprisingly, however, Christina's real relief comes from divine dreams. First the cleric is visited in a dream by Mary, who threatens him with eternal damnation if he does not leave Christina alone, and later Christina experiences a vision of Christ:

²²² Talbot, ed., 103-105.

Then the Son of the Virgin looked kindly down up on the low estate of His handmaid and granted her the consolation of an unheard-of grace. For in the guise of a small child He came to the arms of his sorely tried spouse and remained with her a whole day, not only being felt but also seen. So the maiden took Him in her hands, gave thanks, and pressed Him to her bosom. And with immeasurable delight she held Him at one moment to her virginal breast, at another she *felt His presence within her even through the barrier of the flesh.*²²³

This vision has many discursive layers, including the Eucharistic echo of Luke 22:19 found in the phrase, “she took Him in her hands, gave thanks” and the unmistakable image of Christina and Christ mirroring the Virgin Mary holding the infant Jesus.²²⁴ In the discourse of dream theory, this episode marks a true high point for Christina, for it is not only a waking vision, the pinnacle of transcendent experience, but it is also an *oraculum* in which she is visited not by a messenger of God nor by the mother of God, but by God himself in the person of Christ. One can hardly imagine a dream-vision experience that would be a stronger seal of authority for Christina. Moreover, the visionary power is delivered in cooperation with discourse on women. To counteract Christina’s plunge into the lowest reaches of physicality and depravity, this vision seals her virginity by spiritually impregnating her through Christ’s penetration of “the barrier of the flesh” so that she can feel him “within her.” In as physical a way as possible, Christina’s vision identifies her with the Virgin Mary, who reigns as queen of heaven, spiritually embodies a perfect purity that is impossible for normal women to achieve, and exemplifies the greatest possible feminine authority. The Virgin, in fact, is the ultimate example of how the operation of misogynistic discourse cooperates with masculine hegemony to empower a woman. The extraordinary physical paradox that defines Mary—a virgin who is also a mother—is a simultaneously physical and spiritual mark of holiness and the source of her power as Queen of

²²³ *Ibid.*, 119. Emphasis added.

²²⁴ “And taking bread, he gave thanks and brake and gave to them, saying: This is my body, which is given for you. Do this for a commemoration of me” (*et accepto pane gratias egit et fregit et dedit eis dicens hoc est corpus meum quod pro vobis datur hoc facite in meam commemorationem.*) Luke 22:19, Douay-Rheims translation of Latin Vulgate Bible.

Heaven. The visionary conferral of the Virgin's authority on Christina will be alluded to later in the *Life*; for, as Atkinson observes, "when the Virgin brought medicine to Christina during a desperate illness, she appeared not as a mother with a baby, but as 'a woman of great authority.'"²²⁵ Like that of the Virgin, Christina's body is so unified with her spirituality that even her physical medicine is delivered from the transcendent realm by the Queen of Heaven herself. As hagiography demands, Christina's unification of body and spirit is reiterated through the many divine dreams and visions that she continues to experience in the remainder of the text as well as through the dreams and visions sent to others by God to confirm that they should heed Christina's instruction. Thus, the text endlessly affirms the propriety of Christina's informal but considerable power over men and does so because the ambiguities of the discourses of dream theory and anti-feminism open a space for discursive cooperation that allows the simultaneous expression of both masculine control and feminine power.

4.4 Visions, Personal Power, and Margery Kempe

The Book of Margery Kempe resists generic definition; but those who accept that the main character is not entirely a fictional construction generally characterize it as an autobiography and, thus, a text of personal validation. If, as some suggest, *The Book of Margery Kempe* was intended to follow the hagiographic tradition rather than to act as a work of personal vindication, it is a spectacular failure because ultimately none of the authorizing power of the divine that permeates the text authorizes anything but Margery herself.²²⁶ The text repeatedly draws us into Margery's personal spiritual world and individual struggle instead of imparting a deep, universal lesson or establishing the woman as a saint whose power transcends time. As Sarah Beckwith observes, even Margery's participation in the Eucharist

²²⁵ Atkinson, "Authority, Virtue, and Vocation: The Implications of Gender in Two Twelfth-Century English Lives," 179.

²²⁶ See, for example, Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglican Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages*, University of Chicago Press (Chicago, 1989), 47.

functions at the level of personal significance rather than the level of universalizing ritual as it generally does in the Middle Ages.²²⁷ Diane Watt has argued that *The Book of Margery Kempe* is “part of a broad tradition of women’s prophetic writing,” including *The Life of Christina of Markyate* and *A Revelation of Purgatory* as well as the work of Margery’s primary role model Bridget of Sweden, but she notes that there is “little evidence in Kempe’s *Book* of the influence of Bridget’s political prophecy.”²²⁸ Watt contends, however, that Margery does chastise figures in positions of secular and religious power. While this assertion is true, except in the case of swearing monks whom she spontaneously corrects both individually and collectively, Margery’s reproof of authority figures nearly always follows their reproof of her. That is to say, Margery is generally seeking the favor of masculine authority figures rather than their reformation, and if she receives their approval, she does not tend to engage in prophetic reproaches. I argue that Margery tends, instead, to chastise when she is in need of a form personal defense and that the *Book*’s parallels with the paradigm of women’s prophetic writing have more to do with the construction of Margery’s personal identity according to models like Bridget than with a truly public purpose. Although excerpts from the *Book* were circulated as a devotional text in the 1501 printing of Wynkyn de Worde and the 1521 reprint by Henry Pepwell, the autobiographical nature of the text prevents us from attributing to it an intent to produce a book of devotion. I argue that the goal of the text is to authorize only the words and activities of its individual subject, and it succeeds in this aim in part by providing a space for the expression of

²²⁷ Beckwith notes that Margery’s “eucharistic piety is more a singling out, a mark of a special religiosity, rather than the collective ritual of the mass.” Sarah Beckwith, *Christ’s Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 95.

²²⁸ Watt, *Secretaries of God*, 33-34. However, Susan Eberly argues that Mary Magdalene was a more immediate model for Margery than any of those listed. Susan Eberly, “Margery Kempe, St Mary Magdalene, and Patterns of Contemplation,” *The Downside Review* 107 (1989).

cooperation between dream discourse and discourse on women in spite of an otherwise ubiquitous masculine hegemony.

Because she describes so many dreams and visions throughout the book, we see that Margery Kempe takes advantage of the discourse of dreaming to support her self-perception and to influence the way readers will perceive her text. The authorizing power of Margery Kempe's dreams and visions, then, functions on two levels: for the historical woman telling her story, they provide the private, personal assurance of God's approval that embolden her performances of public piety and her resistance to masculine control, while their narration in her book is a textual attempt to publically justify her status as a religious authority for the audience of the text, much as the dreams and visions present in the narratives of Hild and Christina do. I will focus my analysis on the content and effects of some of Margery's visions and discursive constructions rather than the events of her life, and because her story is well-known I give only a brief summary here.²²⁹

²²⁹ I use the Medieval Institute edition of the Middle English text edited by Lynn Staley as the primary text for my analysis. Two excellent modern English translations are Lynn Staley, ed., *The Book of Margery Kempe* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2001); Barry Windeatt, ed., *The Book of Margery Kempe* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985). In *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* Staley initiated the practice of referring to the protagonist of the book as Margery to distinguish the character from the author, whom she called Kempe. I will follow this usage for the sake of convenience, but as with the Christina/Theodora issue above, I believe a productive tension needs to be maintained through the acknowledgement that the constructed character, and in this case the constructed author, are predicated on the existence and experience of the real, historical person, Margery Kempe. Lynn Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994). A seminal work for contextualizing Margery Kempe is Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and the World of Margery Kempe*. Although the *Book of Margery Kempe* is commonly referred to as the oldest, surviving autobiography in English, some scholars are not convinced that the real, historic Margery Kempe of the book actually existed; or, if she existed, they believe she did not have the experiences narrated in the

Daughter of the mayor of King's Lynn, Margery is married to a prominent burgher and gives birth to fourteen children. After the difficult birth of her first child, Margery suffers a lengthy period of madness brought on by the stress of the birth and fear of damnation for an unconfessed, unnamed sin. After more than six months in this state, she experiences a vision in which Jesus appears to her and comforts her with assurances of his constant love and approval. She will continue to have visions and conversations with Christ, Mary, God, and saints for the rest of her life. Sometimes her holy conversations and dream-vision experiences include a visual element, while at other times they are only auditory; and some are entirely internal, meaning that they are conducted without the sense that she actually hears or sees anything but instead feels the communication take place in her spirit. Along with these incidents, Margery describes other expressions of her extraordinary piety in the form numerous pilgrimages and her infamous bouts of loud weeping known as the gift of compunction.²³⁰ After many years of

book. Sarah Rees Jones, for example, argues that Margery Kempe is a fictional character and the book a "novel" written by a monk to and for a male audience for the purpose of chastising the clergy of England. I find her argument unconvincing. Sarah Rees Jones, "'A Peler of Holy Cherch': Margery Kempe and the Bishops," in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain: Essays for Felicity Riddy* ed. Rosalynn Voaden, Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, and A. Diamond (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2010).

²³⁰ Much of Margery's life seems to have been a performance of the sorts of affective piety encouraged by the likes of Nicholas Love, Richard Rolle, and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, though it would be naïve to treat the widely divergent practices represented by the authors of various mystical texts as a homogenous group. For more on these and other medieval mystics see chapter 5 in Beer; Kantik Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Ralph Hanna, "Rolle and Related Works," in *A Companion to Middle English Prose*, ed. A. S. G. Edwards (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 2004); Ad Putter, "Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* and *the Cloud of Unknowing*," in *A Companion to Middle English Prose*, ed. A. S. G. Edwards (Woodbridge Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 2004). For

marriage, Margery persuades (bribes) her husband to agree to a chaste marriage. He is not particularly happy about this, but he seems to continue an affectionate relationship with her and even seems to support her religious fervor to a point. Many years later, Margery faithfully nurses him through his lingering final illness. Frequently travelling alone on pilgrimages, Margery suffers the abuse of some who do not appreciate her style of piety and others who suspect her of heresy, and on several occasions she is examined by officials on charges of Lollardy.²³¹ Margery has a great deal of difficulty getting her story written because she is illiterate and requires a scribe to whom she can dictate the book; however, after many years and multiple attempts, she finally persuades a priest to write the story of her life as she dictates it to him.²³²

The Book of Margery Kempe is the only example included in this project of what we might designate a feminine text, as Kempe depicts a woman who is able to resist the patriarchal system quite effectively throughout most of her life and exercises a remarkable amount of control over her own body and living conditions. She endures a great deal throughout the book, but any suffering she does not inflict upon herself in her zeal to imitate Christ is less the imposition of a masculinist system trying to suppress the autonomy of a woman and more the intolerance of a society that simply does not understand or really even like her very much.²³³

more on the *Book* as performance, see Sheila Christie, "'Thei Stodyn Upon Stoyls for to Beheldyn Hir": Margery Kempe and the Power of Performance," *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* 38 (2002).

²³¹ For more on the Lollard movement, see Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1984); Ghosh.

²³² Anthony Goodman discusses the chapters in which the priest explains how he finally comes to believe in Margery's piety and spiritual insight. Anthony Goodman, "The Piety of John Brunham's Daughter, of Lynn," in *Medieval Women: Dedicated and Presented to Professor Rosalind M. T. Hill on the Occasion of Her Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978).

²³³ This is in no way intended to diminish the importance of Margery's suffering in *imitatio Christi*. I agree with Karma Lochrie that Margery's *imitatio* functions, as does that practiced by other women, to provide a piety located in the body, a monist unification of body and spirit that Lochrie identifies as "the flesh and the

She does not express her motives or her actions as anachronistic, proto-feminist demands for women's rights, but, as much as Margery seems to accept the misogynistic code that defines her, she does stand up for her right to speak as a woman when masculine authority seeks to use her gender to silence her. As a feminine text, then, *The Book of Margery Kempe* offers insight into the way the discourse of dreaming and the discourse of anti-feminism cooperate to authorize personal resistance to patriarchal control. Margery Kempe does not speak or act for all women, and she makes little or no lasting impact on the masculine hegemony that surrounds her, but she does authorize her own freedom through visionary experiences. As she translates these experiences into text, Kempe employs these cooperating discourses to authorize both its content and production for the audience.

The scribe of Margery Kempe's book acknowledges the ambiguities of dream discourse in the long proem that begins the book by noting that Margery worried a great deal over whether her spiritual experiences were diabolical or divine in origin:

Than had this creatur mech drede for illusyons and deceytys of hyr gostly enmys. Than went sche be the byddyng of the Holy Gost to many worshepful clerkys, bothe archebyssshopys and bysshoppys, doctowrs of dyvynyte and bachelers also. Sche spak also wyth many ankrys and schewed hem hyr maner of levyng and swech grace as the Holy Gost of hys goodnesse wrowt in hyr mende and in hyr sowle as her wytt wold serven hyr to expressyn it. And thei alle that sche schewed hyr secretys unto seyde sche was mech bownde to loven ower Lord for the grace that he schewyd unto hyr and counseld hyr to folwyn hyr mevyngys and hyr steringys and trustly belevyn it weren of the Holy Gost and of noon evyl spyryt.²³⁴

Word." Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), 46. Also see Sarah Beckwith, "A Very Medieval Mysticism: The Medieval Mysticism of Margery Kempe," in *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Jane Chance (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996).

²³⁴ Lynn Staley, ed., *The Book of Margery Kempe* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996), 18-19. The long proem was added by the scribe after he had completed one quire of the book. He says that he added it later because he wanted to give a fuller account of how the book came to be written than he had given in the short proem that he had written first. Thus, the long proem precedes the short proem in the text even though it was written later.

As we know, concerns over the origin of meaningful dreams were an integral part of dream theory from the first writings of the church fathers through the height of the early modern age, and there is little doubt that the scribe would have been exposed to these concerns through various exegetical and pastoral texts, just as Kempe would have known them from folk-lore and popular wisdom. Margery's concern not only reflects a generally accepted wariness regarding transcendent experiences but also is in keeping with the persona of humble self-doubt maintained for her throughout the book. The assurances of "worshepful clerkys, bothe archebyssshopys and bysshoppys, doctowrs of dyvynyte and bachelors" along with those of "many ankrys," Julian of Norwich among them, provide authorization from the anti-feminist church hierarchy as well as from other mystics that the moving and stirrings she describes, which include her visions of Christ, are indeed from the Holy Ghost. Dispelling the possibility that Margery Kempe is simply another of the dangerously deceived and deceptive daughters of Eve of whom we have seen so many literary examples, Kempe and the scribe establish that the dreams and visions that will follow in the text are properly identified, and that those presented as divinely inspired do, in fact, transfer that divine authority to the woman who reports them. Firmly making this assertion in the first few pages of the text, Kempe and the scribe assure the reader that the visionary woman has heavenly authorization for her deviations from traditional social roles, her instruction and chastisement of men – including highly ranked churchmen – and her defiance of anti-feminist conventions.²³⁵ The discourse of dream theory, then, is used in conjunction with traditional masculinist authority structures to pre-authorize both Margery and her text in the minds of readers.

Establishing Margery as a reliable evaluator of her dream-vision origins so early in the book is vital because the first dream she narrates is diabolical in origin. Suffering from the

²³⁵ Margery's deviation from traditional social roles includes, according to Staley, a sense that "her special relationship with Christ somehow allows her transcend gender roles." Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions*.

madness that follows the difficult delivery of her first child and the failure of her confessor to allow her to complete her confession and so that she can receive absolution for a long-standing un-confessed sin, Margery reports being tormented by harrowingly devilish dreams or visions:

And in this tyme sche sey, as hir thowt, develys opyn her mowthys al inflaumyd wyth brennyng lowys of fyr as thei schuld a swalwyd hyr in, sumtyme rampyng at hyr, sumtyme thretyng her, sumtym pullyng hyr and halynge hir bothe nygth and day duryng the forseyd tyme. And also the develys cryed upon hir wyth greet thretyngys and bodyn hir sche schuld forsake hir Crystendam, hir feyth, and denyin hir God, hys modyr, and alle the seyntyngs in hevyn, hyr goode werkys and alle good vertues, hir fadyr, hyr modyr, and alle hire frendys. And so sche dede. Sche slawndred hir husbond, hir frendys and her owyn self; sche spak many a reprevows worde and many a schrewyd worde; sche knew no vertu ne goodnesse; sche desyryd all wykkydnesse; lych as the spyrytys temptyd hir to sey and do so sche seyde and dede.²³⁶

Many contemporary readers are apt to dismiss Margery's six months of raving as a particularly violent expression of post-partum depression, but it is extremely important to note that her madness is the direct result of her confessor's failure to shrive her properly and is deeply rooted in feelings of guilt and condemnation that predate the birth of her child. Most who choose to speculate extrapolate from other statements Margery gives of her struggle with lust that the unnamed sin is sexual in nature, and this theory implies an association with misogynistic concepts of women as sexually insatiable. Even if we choose not to conjecture on the nature of Margery's secret sin, however, we can easily establish the discourse of misogyny as an integral part of her oppressive guilt. She has, after all, just endured months of illness during pregnancy and a torturous delivery, both of which are considered the physical half of the curse of Eve that all women share, the other half being, of course, subservience to men. Thus, the diabolical visions that Margery suffers in her madness are closely tied to feminine corporeality, female guilt for the Fall, and Margery's personal share in both.

The redemption that Margery experiences, however, also comes in the form of a vision, but this experience is divine in origin and content:

as sche lay aloone and hir kepars wer fro hir, owyr mercyful Lord Crist
Jhesu, evyr to be trostyde, worshypte be hys name, nevyr forsakyng hys servawnt in

²³⁶ Staley, ed., *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 22.

tyme of nede, aperyd to hys creatur, whych had forsakyn hym, in lyknesse of a man, most semly, most bewtyuows, and most amyable that evyr mygth be seen wyth mannys eye, clad in a mantyl of purpyl sylke, syttyng upon hir beddys syde, loking upon hir wyth so blyssyd a chere that sche was strengthyd in alle hir spyrytis, seyde to hir thes wordys: "Dowtyr, why hast thou forsakyn me, and I forsoke nevyr the?" And anoon, as he had seyde thes wordys, sche saw veryly how the eyr openyd as brygth as ony levyn, and he stey up into the eyr, not rygth hastyli and qwykly, but fayr and esly that sche mygth wel beholdyn hym in the eyr tyl it was closyd ageyn.²³⁷

As we saw in the *Life of Christina*, a vision of this type rises to the pinnacle of dream theory possibilities, for it is both a waking vision and an *oraculum* from God himself in the person of Christ. The message that Christ brings to Margery is for her personal comfort and includes an important assurance that even during her devilish torments and, perhaps more significantly, even though she still has not confessed the unnamed sin, Jesus has been with her. His appearance to her as a beautiful man dressed in kingly splendor is also noteworthy because in many of her visions and conversations Margery's relationship with Jesus is romantic and somewhat erotic in nature. Margery's attraction to the love and amiability of Christ is always supplemented by a sense of physical attraction that endows both Margery's spirituality and the transcendence of the divine with an inescapable corporeal component. Had we not already been assured in the long proem that sanctioned masculine authorities have already determined that Margery does have access to divine transcendence, we could easily wonder whether this vision, and indeed those that follow, were not as diabolical as the first. In fact, we might see them as tricks of the devil designed to delude Margery into believing that she has been forgiven of her secret sin without benefit of clerical mediation and that she has divine authorization to ignore and defy masculine religious and secular authority when in fact she does not. Because she is already identified as a reliable, inspired dreamer and interpreter, though, Margery's first vision of Christ, like all of her subsequent dreams, visions, and conversations with holy figures, can be accepted as truly divine and as authorization both for the unconventional and heterodox behavior in which the character engages and for the theological and instructional value of

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

Kempe's text. Margery's physical participation in the curse of Eve, exaggerated by her susceptibility to demonic attack, is not, however, erased by Christ's uncritical acceptance of her. Instead, the vision joins spirituality to Margery's corporeality, and the two discourses work in cooperation to confirm the authority of both character and text. Masculine hegemony is, nevertheless, maintained because orthodox, anti-feminist clerical power provides the foundational sanction for all that follows.

Margery's trials for heresy are clustered in the year 1417, the same year in which John Oldcastle was burned for Lollardy.²³⁸ Although discourses of orthodoxy and heresy and of clerical conduct are prominent throughout this section of Margery's text, anti-feminist discourse drives many of the accusations made against her.²³⁹ The steward of Leicester, one of the first officials to examine Margery, takes her into a private room and attempts to rape her, or to frighten her enough to believe that he will, before demanding that Margery reveal to him "whethyr thu hast this speche of God er of the devyl, er ellys thu schalt gon to preson."²⁴⁰ When Margery refuses to answer him, he struggles with her again until she admits that "sche had hyr speche and hir dalyawns of the Holy Gost and not of hir owyn cunyng."²⁴¹ The attempted rape, of course, calls attention to Margery as a female body, while the question of whether she is acting through divine or diabolical inspiration highlights the fear that women are easily deceived and pass on that deception. The steward succinctly sums up the problematic nature of misogynist discourse with his words of dismissal: "Eythyr thu art a ryth good woman er ellys a ryth wikked woman," recalling the famous polarization of woman as either the bride of

²³⁸ Claire Cross discusses the presence and activity of women in the Lollard movement. Claire Cross, "Great Reasoners in Scripture," in *Medieval Women: Dedicated and Presented to Professor Rosalind M. T. Hill on the Occasion of Her Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978).

²³⁹ For a fascinating discussion of the rhetoric of Margery's trials, see Ruth Shklar, "Cobham's Daughter," *Modern Language Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (1995); and Beer.

²⁴⁰ Staley, ed., *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 115.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Christ or the gateway of the devil, but nothing in between.²⁴² Similarly, in her first examination before the archbishop of York, standard misogynistic injunctions against women's speech are brought to bear, and Margery first answers with an allusion to Luke 11:27, in which a woman publically speaks a blessing on the Virgin, as evidence that women are given the right to public speech in the Bible.²⁴³ Immediately, as one might expect, a cleric reads the injunction of Paul against women's preaching from I Timothy 2:12, which Margery answers with the assertion that she does not go into the pulpit and only engages in holy conversation.²⁴⁴ Thus, the wickedness of woman, her required subservience, and her enforced silence are used against Margery, but she resists these attacks through assertion of her spiritual communion with God, biblical authority, and a quibble. Ruth Shklar notes that Kempe employs a strategy designed to avoid the question of whether she is a Lollard by "never addressing Lollardy directly but only the authorities' interpretation of her affinities with heretical beliefs."²⁴⁵ As the archbishop prepares to put her out of the town, he requires that she have a male escort:

Than a good sad man of the Erchebisshopys meny askyd hys Lord what he wolde gevyn hym and he schulde ledyn hir. The Erchebisshop proferyd hym five shillings and the man askyd a nobyl. The Erchebisshop, answeyng, seyde, "I wil not waryn so mech on hir body."²⁴⁶

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ And it came to pass, as he spoke these things, a certain woman from the crowd, lifting up her voice, said to him: Blessed is the womb that bore thee and the paps that gave thee suck (*factum est autem cum haec diceret extollens vocem quaedam mulier de turba dixit illi beatus venter qui te portavit et ubera quae suxisti*). Luke 11:27. Douay-Rheims translation of the Latin Vulgate Bible.

²⁴⁴ But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to use authority over the man: but to be in silence (*docere autem mulieri non permitto neque dominari in virum sed esse in silentio*). I Timothy 2:12. Douay-Rheims translation of the Latin Vulgate Bible.

²⁴⁵ Shklar: 279.

²⁴⁶ Staley, ed., *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 128.

Here, through the archbishop's bartering over the value of Margery's body, we see that masculinist discourse on woman ends by defining her in material terms of exchange value, reinforcing the polarity of spirit/matter dualism and limiting the feminine to the realm of the corporeal.

In the midst of these trials, Margery enjoys numerous spiritual conversations with Christ. Imprisoned, this time in the town of Beverley, she hears him call to her audibly:

The seyde creatur, lying in hir bed the next nyth folwyng, herd wyth hir bodily erys a lowde voys clepyng, "Margery." Wyth that voys sche woke, gretly aferyd, and, lying stille in sylens, sche mad hir preyerys as devowtly as sche cowde for the tyme. And sone owr merciful Lord ovyrall present, comforyng hys unworthy servawnt, seyde unto hir, "Dowtyr, it is mor plesyng unto me that thou suffyr despitys and scornys, schamys and reprevys, wrongys and disesyng than yif thin hed wer smet of thre tymes on the day every day in sevyn yer. And therfor, dowtyr, fere the nowt what any man can seyn onto the, but in myn goodnes and in thy sorwys that thou hast suffryd therin hast thou gret cawse to joyn, for, whan thou comyst hom into hevyn, than schal every sorwe turnyn the to joye."²⁴⁷

Whether this dream-visionary experience has a visual element is difficult to say because Margery does not define what "owr merciful Lord ovyrall present" means in clear sensory terms, but she does make a point of distinguishing this episode from others in the same section of the book in which Jesus has spoken in her soul rather than audibly.²⁴⁸ Having been subjected by the masculinist clerical system to the oppressive application of the discourse of misogyny that ultimately reduces her to a mere body, Margery nevertheless calls attention to the physical reality of this vision of Christ. All of her supernatural conversations highlight her possession of a highly developed spiritual nature (in spite of misogynist assertions to the contrary), but this one is clearly characterized as both spiritual and corporeal, and the juxtaposition of this particular visionary account with the anti-feminist degradation of her trials for heresy functions to revise rather than to elide the power of discursive ties between the feminine and the body. Instead of allowing misogynistic discourse to polarize and marginalize her, Margery deploys it in

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 130-131.

²⁴⁸ For example, in York she "sat in a chirche of Yorke, owr Lord Jhesu Crist seyde in hir sowle, 'Dowtyr, ther is meche tribulacyon to thewarde.'" Ibid., 120.

cooperation with the authorizing power of dream discourse to integrate spirit and body.²⁴⁹ In this way Margery effectively authorizes both her resistance to masculine control and her rebuke of the system trying to impose it on her, while Kempe reiterates the propriety of the message of her text and its authority.

Thus, the cooperation between discourses of dreaming and anti-feminism works as well for personal purposes as it does for history and hagiography. Gayle Margherita's argument that Margery engages in an "inversion or reversal of gender hierarchies" to "open up a space within which the female authorial voice can potentially be heard" relies, as do so many feminist readings of the *Book*, on a model of discursive contention. My reading of discursive cooperation does not preclude the inversion Margherita describes but rather allows for the interplay between conventional and inverted gender hierarchies. In a model of contention, as we have seen with fictionalized accounts of women's dreams, even where they can be found, alternate discourses are so obscured by anti-feminism as to be nearly indecipherable. In a model of cooperation like that in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, we can instead see the inversion almost as clearly as we see the convention.²⁵⁰

4.5 Politics and Visionary Authority: The Success and Failure of the Holy Maid of Kent

Perhaps less well-known than some of her medieval mystical counterparts is Elizabeth Barton, the Holy Maid of Kent. Her case is particularly revealing to a discussion of the cooperation of dream theory and theories of women because it shows both the authorizing power available to women at this discursive intersection as well as the ways that the ambiguities

²⁴⁹ For a discussion of the conflation of other binaries such as the active and contemplative lives or the mystical body and the social body in the *Book*, see Joel Fredell, "Margery Kempe: Spectacle and Spiritual Governance," *Philological Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (1996). For a view of the *Book* as a collaboration between Margery and the scribe that bridges the masculine/feminine divide, see Wendy Harding, "Body into Text: *The Book of Margery Kempe*," in *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, ed. Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

²⁵⁰ Gayle Margherita, *The Romance of Origins* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 13.

inherent in these two cultural languages can be turned against the dreaming woman.²⁵¹ Elizabeth Barton's career as a visionary begins with a spectacular combination of discourses that propel her meteoric rise to near saintly status and end with the same combined discourses used to destroy her and the male associates who had shared her power.²⁵² In 1525 the

²⁵¹ Long vilified by protestant apologists as an immoral tool in the hands of scheming Catholic Svengalis who traded on the gullibility of the English people in a plot to wrest control of the country from the divinely appointed sovereign and to maintain the power of the corrupt Roman Catholic Church, Barton's life is primarily known from documents related to her accusation, trial, conviction, and discrediting. Contemporary or near contemporary primary texts that support her are few, though the accusations made and sermons preached against her are endlessly repeated in later texts. A fairly faithful reproduction of the first printed account of Barton's visions and miracles, *A Marueilous Woorke of Late Done at Court of Streete in Kent* by Edward Thwaites, is provided by William Lambarde in his 1576 refutation of the tract. A single leaf from the introduction to a two-volume work on her life by her mentor Dom Edward Bocking remains, but not one of the seven hundred copies of the first volume of Bocking's book seems to have survived the purging that followed the Holy Maid's arrest and execution. None of the very popular original Thwaites pamphlets is known to exist, although at least one must have remained extant until Lambarde published his refutation. References in the notes of the Spanish ambassador, attacks on her by Tyndale, letters and statements made by Thomas More, a lengthy letter enumerating thirty miracles and visions (that is possibly the correspondence between Cromwell and a criminal acting as his spy in the tower), along with relatively brief references to her in other documents provide details of her story as well as context for much of what is presented against her in the Act of Attainder and the sermons preached against her. Her life is sympathetically retold by J. R. McKee, *Dame Elizabeth Barton O.S.B., the Holy Maid of Kent* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1925) and by Alan Neame, *The Holy Maid of Kent: The Life of Elizabeth Barton, 1506-1534* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1971). Also see Ethan H. Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Watt, *Secretaries of God*.

²⁵² I do not intend to assert, as many have done, any claim as to Elizabeth's visionary authenticity or lack thereof, though this seems to have been the most important question for many scholars who have

nineteen-year-old Elizabeth, who is a servant in the home of Thomas Cobb of Kent, suffers a long and serious illness that often affects her ability to breathe and speak and also sends her into trances. During these episodes she experiences convulsions and often speaks, sometimes unintelligibly.²⁵³ After she has been ill for quite some time, Elizabeth experiences one of her fits while being nursed in the same room with an infant, and she tells those present that the child will soon die. When this prediction is fulfilled, her caregivers begin to take more notice of the things she says when overcome by a paroxysm, and soon enough evidence is gathered of her prophetic words and visionary experiences to justify an investigation by the church. A group of respected monks and priests examine Elizabeth; and finding her statements doctrinally sound, for she advocates all sorts of sanctioned devotional practices such as pilgrimages, confession, and the purchase of masses for the dead, the commission determines that she is neither a fraud nor suffering from demonic attacks. This masculine, ecclesiastical authorization of Elizabeth Barton's access to oracles of divine will and future events confirms her visionary power to the

addressed her story. Some have clearly asserted that the visions and prophecies were faked wholly or in part. See, for example, Retha Warnicke, *Women of the English Renaissance and Reformation* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983). Others have argued that Elizabeth's dreams, visions, and prophecies were genuine. See, for example, Neame. Still others have argued that the Holy Maid was mentally ill and, therefore, the visions were clearly false, but we should not blame her for them. See the gentlemanly but condescending treatment she receives in Alfred Denton Cheney, "The Holy Maid of Kent," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 18 (1904). Sharon L. Jansen takes the view Elizabeth Barton may have used the tradition of political prophecy to advance her own political views and that she, rather than the men who surrounded and supported her, was "the powerful one." Jansen acknowledges that the sort of cooperation I am arguing for probably existed between Barton and her male friends: "the men who supported the 'Nun of Kent' found in her someone who could 'consolidate their power' . . . But Elizabeth Barton had much to gain from this relationship as well." Jansen, 72.

²⁵³ Neame offers a long list of possible medical conditions that might explain her illness. See chapter 4 in Neame.

English faithful, and like earlier examples of such authorizations it operates recursively: masculine confirmation of her spirituality sanctions her feminine power, while her employment of that power in the service of the church reinforces the church's masculine authority.²⁵⁴ Over time, Elizabeth's visions and prophecies become increasingly Marian and center on devotion at the shrine of Our Lady of Court at Streete. In 1526 Elizabeth is miraculously healed by the Virgin in a public ceremony held at this chapel in the sight of around three thousand witnesses.²⁵⁵ Soon thereafter, the Holy Maid takes orders at St. Sepulchre's Canterbury, where Dom Edward Bocking becomes her confessor.²⁵⁶

For several years Elizabeth has visions, gives prophecies, performs miracles, and provides spiritual counsel to large numbers of believers without troubling incident. Her reputation as a powerful visionary woman spreads, but she is not personally enriched nor apparently spoiled by the attention and adoration she receives, as she continues to advocate orthodoxy, purity, and devotion to the church and seems to practice these virtues herself. Moreover, her ability to distinguish between devilish and divine visions is confirmed when she is consulted by another young visionary named Helen. Elizabeth tells the girl to ignore her visions, determining that Helen's visions, unlike her own, were diabolical illusions. Helen does begin to ignore them and confirms that Elizabeth was correct. Elizabeth has become a saintly celebrity

²⁵⁴ Shagan notes that Elizabeth Barton's rise to power was dependent on the continued operation of the medieval tradition of the "holy maid." Shagan, 64. Also see Watt, "Reconstructing the Word: The Political Prophecies of Elizabeth Barton."

²⁵⁵ It seems, though, that she continued to suffer with the illness, especially on holy days.

²⁵⁶ According to Watt, although Lambarde takes the position that the church authorizes Elizabeth's (supposed) power for its own purposes and that she, enjoying her promotion from servant to living saint, gives them what they need, one might also argue that her "advancement" to the convent and Bocking's supervision "can be seen as the re-integration into a male-controlled church of a religious enthusiasm which would otherwise be difficult to contain." Watt, *Secretaries of God*, 62.

around England, and even the king has a document listing some of her devout dreams and sayings, which he asks Thomas More to look over and give his opinion on.

In 1528, within a year of Henry VIII's decision to divorce Catherine of Aragon and marry Anne Boleyn, Elizabeth Barton, perhaps inadvertently, enters politics, and the influence based on dream discourse that she wields is staggering.²⁵⁷ First, Archbishop Warham of Canterbury obtains an audience for the Holy Maid with Cardinal Wolsey, who has been given the unenviable task of procuring an annulment of Henry and Catherine's marriage to open the way for the king's marriage to Anne Boleyn. She tells Wolsey that she has had a vision of him holding three swords: one represents his religious power, one his political power, and the other his power regarding the king's divorce. Elizabeth warns Wolsey that God is watching how he handles these swords and expects the exercise of righteous judgment. The threat to Wolsey is obvious, but it is from God, not Elizabeth. Over the next four years, Elizabeth Barton relates her visions and messages from God opposing the divorce (and warning Henry of the perils he faces should he continue to pursue it) to the most powerful people in England, including Warham, Wolsey, and Thomas More, and she sends messages to the pope himself on the topic. Surprisingly, on at least two occasions she obtains audiences with the king during which she reports her visions and warnings directly to the sovereign, yet no action is taken against her for a very long time. Indeed, she survives and continues to inveigh against Henry's divorce even after the fall and death of Warham and of Wolsey. Thomas More narrowly escapes being tried with her for treason. Finally, though, in 1534, Elizabeth Barton is arrested for sedition. Long public sermons are preached against her, and she is accused of faking her visions, being the puppet of Bocking against the king, and, perhaps most damagingly, of being Bocking's lover. The sexualization of the accusations against Elizabeth is highly significant, as her virginity is the

²⁵⁷ "Persons of every rank in society consulted her as an inspired prophetess; she bearded Henry in his palace; she threatened the Papal ambassadors with the vengeance of the Almighty upon Pope Clement, should he fail in his duty in the matter of divorce through deference to the royal power." Cheney: 117.

seal of her holiness: her body is the warrant for her spirituality.²⁵⁸ The Act of Attainder drawn up against her also makes these accusations; and, denounced as a lying harlot, Elizabeth Barton is drawn and hanged for treason at Tyburn alongside Bocking and several other men associated with her.²⁵⁹

Although an unsigned letter written to Cromwell lists thirty visions and prophecies attributed to the Holy Maid of Kent, given her reputation and the length of her career, this is undoubtedly only a tiny fraction of the number she actually must have experienced. The scope of this project does not allow for treatment of all of these visions; however, examination of her early career and her healing at Court at Streete along with analysis of a subsequent vision of high political and religious importance will demonstrate both the cooperation of discourses that invested her with power and the inversion of this cooperation that destroyed her.

Elizabeth's visions began during a time of great physical illness from which it was feared she would not recover. Just as we have seen before, emphasis on the female body necessarily deploys the discourse of anti-feminism and, thus, emphasizes the corporeality of the woman in question.²⁶⁰ Especially where the body is virginal, as with the Holy Maid, highlighting its corporeality and nearness to death along with access to the spiritual realm through the liminality of dreams and visions serves to combine the power of both cultural languages to authorize a monistic physical spirituality. In Lambarde's account of the description given by

²⁵⁸ Crawford notes that Elizabeth Barton's enemies "hoped to undermine her spiritual credibility by destroying her reputation as a virtuous woman." Patricia Crawford, *Women and Religion in England 1500-1720* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 29.

²⁵⁹ Neame's description of her execution is fascinating, but graphic. Neame.

²⁶⁰ Watt notes that, particularly for women, "illness and physical suffering signified their liminal status between this world and the next and their physical submission to the divine, while at the same time emphasizing the disjunction between the prophetic voice and the sinful female flesh." Watt, *Secretaries of God*, 61. I argue, however, that emphasis on a disjunction calls great attention to the fact that union is possible.

Thwaites of Elizabeth's public healing, we are told that she fell into a trance "like a body diseased of the falling evil" and uttered numerous rhyming speeches of Marian devotion, and here we see these discourses combined to authorize Elizabeth's holiness through her physical suffering and transcendent access.²⁶¹ Because of the ambiguity of both discourses, however, their cooperation can also work to the opposite effect of discrediting the woman and reducing her to the deceived and deceptive stereotype of misogyny. In Cranmer's hostile version of the healing, Elizabeth Barton is described as "disfigured, her tongue hanging out, and her eyes being in a manner plucked out and laid upon her cheeks."²⁶² This physical description does far more than call to mind the woman's corporeality; it describes her in terms appropriate to tormented bodies in hell or the writhing witches of demonology. Because Cranmer adds that she also speaks of hell, the negative pole of the anti-feminist paradigm of women as the gateway of Satan is also emphasized. Even Alan Neame, whose biography of Elizabeth Barton verges on modern hagiography, acknowledges that the "grotesque" behavior of the Holy Maid must have called the possibility of demonic possession to mind.²⁶³ As portrayed by Cranmer and others intent on discrediting Elizabeth, her healing at Court at Streete combines misogynistic discourse with the dangerous ambiguity of dream discourse so that all of her visions are susceptible to interpretation as diabolical visitations upon a naturally unholy, unchaste, and frightening feminine body.

Eucharistic visions are among the most common and most powerful in hagiography and are especially important in the lives of female mystics.²⁶⁴ Because of the mystical significance of

²⁶¹ Thwaites quoted in Neame, 71.

²⁶² Cranmer quoted in Shagan, 68. Watt notes that another account by Morison "depicted her ecstasies in implicitly pornographic terms." Watt, *Secretaries of God*, 77.

²⁶³ Neame, 51.

²⁶⁴ See Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*. Bynum discusses the significance of the Eucharist throughout, but see especially page 237.

transubstantiation and the symbolized union with the Body of Christ enjoyed by the recipient, receiving the Eucharist was a performance of participation in divinity and divine power. Thus, Elizabeth's experience of such a vision demonstrating God's opposition to the divorce of Henry and Catherine carries great symbolic meaning and demonstrates the great rhetorical power available when discourses function cooperatively. Among the many discursive layers deployed in a Eucharistic vision experienced by the Holy Maid in 1532, as described in the Act of Attainder that warranted her execution, we see the cooperating discourses of dreaming and misogyny used for both her glorification and destruction:

“When the king's highness was at Calais in the interview between His majesty and the French king, and hearing mass in the church of Our Lay at Calais . . . God was so displeased with the king's highness that his grace saw not that the time at the mass the blessed sacrament in the form of bread, for it was taken away from the priest (being at mass) by an angel, and ministered to the said Elizabeth then being there present and invisible, and suddenly conveyed and rapt thence again by the power of God into the said nunnery where she is professed.”²⁶⁵

This interview between Henry VIII and Francis I was intended, by Henry at least, to seal the French king's support of Henry's divorce and remarriage and was, thus, a direct defiance of the divine authority conveyed upon Elizabeth Barton by God in the form of visions. A Eucharistic vision experienced by a female mystic often demonstrates the woman's direct access to God, through the transubstantiated wafer, in direct contravention of masculine clerical authority. Here the Eucharistic vision is used instead to reinforce the masculine authority of the church by allowing its female representative to prevent the competing masculine authority, Henry, from participating in ritual unification of the Body of Christ. The statements that Elizabeth is “present and invisible” in Calais and then is “rapt thence by the power of God into the said nunnery” obfuscate her physical bodily condition. We may speculate that in her version of the vision Elizabeth is explicitly both bodily and spiritually present at the mass by a mechanism not unimaginable to believers in transubstantiation. In the Act of Attainder's narration, however, whether she is “in the body or out of the body” is difficult to determine. Nevertheless, it is the

²⁶⁵ Act of Attainder quoted in Shagan, 73.

Body of Christ that truly matters in this vision, and it is Elizabeth's body, and not Henry's, that is permitted to unite with the physical Body of Christ, the wafer, and the Body of Christ on Earth, the church. The seditious implications of this vision are clear: Henry is no longer recognized by God as part of the Body of Christ, and whether that is interpreted as the true church or the physical body of Jesus, Elizabeth takes his place as the spiritual and physical participant in the transcendent and corporeal Body of Christ. Nowhere do the discourses of dreaming and anti-feminism cooperate more complexly than they do here. First, Elizabeth's feminine corporeality is emphasized by the union of her physical body with the host in the act of eating; next her physical body is unified to her spirituality by her mystical transportation in the vision, which is itself the confirmation of that spirituality. In addition, Elizabeth's feminine fusion of physicality and spirituality supplants Henry in both the material and divine manifestations of the Body of Christ. The discourses of dream theory and theories of women combine to emphasize Elizabeth's naturally inferior materiality transformed into unified corporeal spirituality in a manner not unlike the incarnation of God in the physical body of Christ, and this occurs at the expense of Henry's natural spiritual and hierarchical superiority. Moreover, as this inversion aims to maintain the hegemony of the masculinist Roman Catholic Church, feminine power and masculine dominance are simultaneously upheld through the cooperation of dream theory and theories of women.

This complex cooperation of discourses, is, of course, operating in defiance of the equally masculinist dominance of the Henrican state, and the competition between these two masculinist power structures ultimately destroys the woman whose visionary power serves the losing side. The dualism that drives misogyny becomes the unstoppable weapon used by the political machine of the masculinist state; by attacking Elizabeth Barton through the trope of sexualized feminine deception, the state destroys whatever authority she has derived through the unification of visionary power and anti-feminist demands of female sexual purity. In the Act of Attainder and the two public sermons, her visions are portrayed as lies inspired by the

diabolical Catholic enemies of the state, and she is portrayed as the promiscuous paramour of these metaphorical devils. Whatever the truth may be about Elizabeth Barton, the masculinist narrative of her lascivious body and deceitfulness proves stronger than the empowering discursive cooperation between dream theory and the more positive possibilities of anti-feminist dualism.

4.6 Conclusion

For real women of the Middle Ages and Renaissance like Hild, Christina, Margery, and Elizabeth, dream discourse offers a rare opportunity for access to power. The divine dream or vision can confer the power of transcendent authority on anyone who is able to achieve the experience, and while fictional women are rarely offered that chance by their creators, just as real women can report their own dreams and visions and perhaps take advantage of the power they offer, men can report the dreams of real women and women's power to uphold masculinist systems, as well. This power is most effective when misogynist traditions of body/spirit dualism that connect woman to the body are negotiated in such a way that the body of the woman is unified with her dream-vision experience. When this melding of body and spirit through dreaming takes place, a monistic narrative displaces dualism and opens a space for feminine power to operate alongside masculine hegemony. Because the discourses of dream theory and theories of women are unstable, however, their cooperative deployment is precarious, and, as in the case of Elizabeth Barton, it can easily be transformed into a destructive cooperation of negatives that not only disrupts the operation of feminine power but also reinforces the worst aspects of misogyny.

CHAPTER 5
MILTON'S EVE
5.1 Introduction

In *Paradise Lost* John Milton famously asserted that the grand purpose of his text was to “justify the ways of God to men.”²⁶⁶ Along the way, Milton re-examined the theological and cultural assumptions underpinning exegetical traditions regarding God, creation, sin, and human nature and produced a text that “through contradictions subverts all claims to dogmatic certitude,” according to Joseph Wittreich.²⁶⁷ Milton’s depiction of Eve in *Paradise Lost* provides a highly complex and multifaceted gloss on traditional misogynist understandings of both Eve and her daughters, and his inclusion of dream experiences for Eve in his epic brings Milton’s complicated perspective to the problematic intersection of discourses on dreams and women.

As I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, both dream theory and theories of women are rooted in a dualistic world-view founded on the polarization of matter and spirit. Masculinist texts from both classical and Christian writings have consistently characterized spirit as masculine and matter as feminine. In cultures where spirit is the privileged term, matter, including earth and the body, is marginalized and is often characterized as a malicious force fighting against the hegemony of spirit. Just as the Yahwist version of creation in Genesis 2 provided many theologians with a means of permanently aligning the feminine with the body

²⁶⁶ John Milton, “Paradise Lost,” in *The Riverside Milton*, ed. Roy Flannagan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Corporation, 1998), 1.26. All references to *Paradise Lost* are to this edition and will henceforth be given parenthetically in the text by book and line number.

²⁶⁷ Joseph Wittreich, “‘Inspired with Contradiction’: Mapping Gender Discourses in *Paradise Lost*,” in *Literary Milton: Text, Pretext, Context*, ed. Diana Trevino Benet and Michael Lieb (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1994), 147.

and with lack of spiritual worth, dream theories deployed this polarization by characterizing dreams associated with the body as meaningless and those originating in the spiritual realm as significant and powerful.²⁶⁸ Such insistent dualism with regard to both women and dreaming, however, was problematized by both tradition and history. Not only did the Bible provide through Mary an example of feminine spiritual perfection that demonstrably opposed the foundations of misogyny, but, as documented in English texts from the Anglo-Saxon period through the Renaissance, many other women also proved themselves the spiritual equals of men.²⁶⁹

Dream theory offers less in the way of direct contradiction to dualistic belief systems than examples like Mary do to misogynist characterizations of women. Nevertheless dream theory, like misogyny, proves inconsistent and ambiguous, as dreams are by their nature difficult, if not impossible, to classify properly. If it were possible to fix the exact location of a dream on the theoretical continuum, such a determination could never be made until after the fact, when events either have either borne out the significance of a particular dream or have not; therefore, the nature of most dreams can never be entirely resolved. The case of dreaming women intensifies the problematic nature of these dualisms: theoretically all body, women should not have access to spiritual, meaningful dreaming. When they do, or seem to, the narrative of patriarchy is disrupted, and it becomes the task of masculine texts to cover over and explain away this difficulty. As we have seen, in the Middle Ages this attempt is generally

²⁶⁸ A thorough analysis of the Genesis exegetical tradition and Milton's use of it is found in Evans, *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition*.

²⁶⁹ It cannot be denied that the Marian ideal is deployed in misogyny through the glorification of virginity, obedience to patriarchy, and effacement of women, but it offered a powerful site of resistance to patriarchy, as well. Recourse to Mary, however, was not necessary to demonstrate the possibility of female spiritual equality. Bede, for example, identifies Abbess Hild as a paragon of "devotion and grace" who served as a spiritual "example of holy life" to both men and women in her community, and the lives of female saints were used to exhort faithfulness and sanctity for Christians of both genders. Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 245.

characterized by the association of dreaming women with a cycle of deception, while in Renaissance drama it often takes the form of linking women's dreams to the downfall of men. Ultimately, however, the dualism that provides the foundation of anti-feminism also opens up the possibility of a positive discourse on women, as our previous literary examples of dreaming women have demonstrated. Thus, in medieval and early modern masculine literature fictionally depicting women as dreamers, we have found the appearance of a unified, monologic cultural language of antifeminist patriarchy that is fissured with multiple discontinuities produced by the overlay of dream theory onto theories of female ontology. Through these fissures, we detect the presence of cultural languages that subvert or disrupt the dominant masculinist narrative. In texts of real women's dream reports, moreover, we have seen the possibility for female agency and power that is present when the ambiguities of theories on women and dreaming are deployed to invert body/spirit dualism and operate in collaboration with masculinist discursive paradigms.

Because the biblical accounts of Eve's creation and her role in the Fall served for so many centuries as justification for misogyny, reappraisal or reinterpretation of these foundational narratives would inevitably alter the operation of cultural discursive complexity. *Paradise Lost* can hardly be reduced to a simple reassessment of Genesis 1-3, but it certainly articulates Milton's unique view of these biblical events. As he engages in his greater task of asserting "Eternal Providence," Milton dramatically revises the traditional masculinist presentation of the woman dreamer while maintaining a message of masculine dominance. The striking difference between Milton's contribution to the literary tradition of dreaming women in English literature and most of what had gone before can be traced in part to his monist, rather than dualist, perception of human spirituality. In Milton's view, body and spirit need not be antagonistic nor antithetical; instead Milton deemed the most perfect manifestation of humanity as a unified body and spirit in which all the faculties work together harmoniously under the

headship of Reason.²⁷⁰ The dreams that Eve experiences in *Paradise Lost* Books 4, 5, and 12 undeniably offer the same possible uses of the traditions of dreaming women as we have seen in other masculinist fictional depictions of dreaming women in Chapters 2 and 3. The dreaming Eve of *Paradise Lost* could easily have been simply another example of these portrayals and their fractured masculinist monovocality. However, because such a depiction would imply that Milton accepted the dualism at the core of both discourses, instead we find in Milton's dreaming Eve a far more positive view of the potential of women to experience spiritual transcendence through dreams and visions, and this depiction is founded on, as well as evidence of, Milton's monistic beliefs.²⁷¹ Milton alters the common portrayal of the dreaming woman just as he alters so many traditions: "in a poetry of planned subversion," Milton uncovers the weaknesses of a convention he deploys, and in so doing he rehabilitates the concept of woman as dreamer without abandoning an expression of masculine dominance.²⁷² Rather than attempting to cover over the inconsistencies inherent in traditional portrayals of dreaming women, Milton accepts

²⁷⁰ Milton's monism is discussed at length in numerous scholarly works. An especially valuable examination of the effect of this monism on his portrayal of Eve are found in Diane Kelsey McColley, *Milton's Eve* (University of Illinois Press, 1983). Also see Ken Hiltner, "The Portrayal of Eve in *Paradise Lost*: Genius at Work," *Milton Studies* 40 (2002). For an explanation of monism in contrast to body/spirit dualism, see Chapter One, note 16.

²⁷¹ As Diane McColley observes, "Until Milton undertook 'things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime,' verbal accounts of the Fall displayed discursively what visual ones suggested graphically: a dualism . . . [representing] the soul made thrall to the body's rebel powers." She further asserts, "Milton was a monist. For him, the distinction between . . . [the spiritual and the material] is one of degree, not of kind" McColley, 9.

²⁷² Joseph Wittreich, *Feminist Milton* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1987), 74. Wittreich also asserts that "Milton's poem . . . pits them [various gender discourses] against one another in such a way as to set this entire poem in an oppositional relationship with the dominant culture." Wittreich, "'Inspired with Contradiction": Mapping Gender Discourses in *Paradise Lost*," 158.

and promotes an alternative. In his portrayals of a dreaming Eve, Milton permits a competing language of feminine validation to be heard along with the dominant language of patriarchy.

5.2 Eve and the Critics

The instability and ambiguity that mark early modern theories of dreams and of women are mirrored in the wide variety of critical interpretations of Eve and the dream she experiences in Book 4 and relates to Adam in Book 5 of *Paradise Lost*. Eve has been seen by many as the quintessential misogynistic representation of the blame and guilt born by all women for the Fall and by many others as a decidedly positive portrayal of the essential worth and value of womankind. She has been understood to allegorize everything from the fallen sensuality of the Flesh to the personification of Wisdom herself. Joseph Wittreich has aptly demonstrated that conflicting interpretations of Eve are in no way a recent phenomenon, but actually date back to Milton's earliest readers. In the third chapter of *Feminist Milton*, he presents a thorough history of the contradictory interpretations of Eve in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and demonstrates that a sort of *querelle des femmes* revolving around Milton's characterization of Eve began long before the emergence of contemporary feminist criticism and deconstructive readings.²⁷³ Examples of the wide array of contradictory readings from the last hundred years or so include H. J. C. Grierson's assertion that Milton believed man's greatest enemies to be "the devil and woman, Satan and Eve."²⁷⁴ An argument that Milton followed the traditional patriarchal tendency to blame much of Adam's fall on Eve's seductive power rather than Satan's deception is summarized by Grant McColley.²⁷⁵ While Kent Hieatt argues that Eve is an allegorical personification of Reason, Edward Sichi reads her as representation of self-love and

²⁷³ Wittreich, *Feminist Milton*, 44-82.

²⁷⁴ H. J. C. Grierson, *Cross Currents in English Literature of the XVII Century* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1929), 161. Quoted in Wittreich, "'Inspired with Contradiction": Mapping Gender Discourses in *Paradise Lost*," 159.

²⁷⁵ Grant McColley, "Paradise Lost," *The Harvard Theological Review* 32, no. 3 (1939).

the overthrow of Reason.²⁷⁶ Christine Froula interprets Eve as a representation of the "threat of woman's self-articulation" through matter and maternity that is suppressed by patriarchal power, but all assertions of a dualistic understanding of Eve are denied by Diane Kelsey McColley.²⁷⁷ Finally, highly positive feminist readings of Eve, *Paradise Lost*, and Milton are asserted by Joseph Wittreich and Diana Trevino Benet.²⁷⁸ This list is far from an exhaustive catalogue of recent critical opinions on Eve, but it does demonstrate the wide variability of interpretations that reflect both the cultural situation of the critic and, at least partly, the ambiguity present in Renaissance attitudes about women that grants credibility to so many contradictory claims.

The wide divergence among critical readings of Eve results in, or perhaps is a demonstration of, the similarly contradictory claims of critics regarding Milton's relative misogyny as demonstrated in *Paradise Lost*. Lee Morrissey follows Karen Edwards in dividing these claims into two groups, the prosecutorial group who see Eve as an exemplar of misogynistic views of women and the apologetic group who see Eve as evidence of Milton's

²⁷⁶ A. Kent Hieatt, "Eve as Reason in a Tradition of Allegorical Interpretation of the Fall," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 43 (1980) Edward Sichi, "Milton and the *Roman De La Rose*: Adam and Eve at the Fountain of Narcissus," in *Milton and the Middle Ages*, ed. John Mulryan (East Brunswick, New Jersey: Bucknell University Press, 1982). For some other quite contradictory readings of Eve, see, for example, Rajan Balachandra, *"Paradise Lost" And the Seventeenth-Century Reader* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1947); Jeanne Clayton Hunter and Georgia B. Christopher, "Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*," *PMLA* 91, no. 1 (1976); Maurice Kelly, *This Great Argument* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941); Dorothy Durkee Miller, "Eve," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 61, no. 3 (1962); Stella P. Revard, "Eve and the Doctrine of Responsibility in *Paradise Lost*," *PMLA* 88, no. 1 (1973); A. J. A. Waldock, *"Paradise Lost" And Its Critics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947).

²⁷⁷ Christine Froula, "When Eve Reads Milton: Undoing the Canonical Economy," *Critical Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (1983). McColley, *Milton's Eve*.

²⁷⁸ Wittreich, *Feminist Milton*. Diana Trevino Benet, "Milton's Toad or Satan's Dream," *Milton Studies* 45 (2006).

proto-feminist views. To these two groups, however, Morrissey adds his own perspective on Milton's portrayal of Eve, one which attempts to reconcile the prosecutorial and apologetic approaches.²⁷⁹ Virginia Woolf's indictment of Milton as a misogynist in *A Room of One's Own* is undoubtedly the most famous prosecutorial statement, but the clearest declaration of the prosecutorial position is Sandra Gilbert's highly influential 1978 exploration of the meaning of "Milton's Bogey" in which she explains the pall cast upon women by the patriarchal anti-feminism of *Paradise Lost*.²⁸⁰ The boldest recent apologist for Milton is Joseph Wittreich, who declares that *Paradise Lost* is about nothing less than the "dethroning of authority and in the formation of new gender paradigms."²⁸¹ I argue, in agreement with Morrissey, that neither of these extremes accurately characterizes the situation of *Paradise Lost* or Milton's depiction of Eve. Because the text never questions Adam's authority over Eve—even prior to the Fall when her submission to him is voluntary rather than part of her post-lapsarian curse—nor challenges the right of the "fiercely masculine" Father to rule all things, its dominant discourse is masculine.²⁸² Milton does not dispute the patriarchal hierarchy that assigns Man a place over Woman, but I argue that he does challenge many conventions of misogyny and anti-feminism in his portrayal of Eve as a dreaming woman.²⁸³

Like critical views on Eve and Milton's misogyny, Eve's dream has been the subject of a variety of opposing interpretations; however, I must note here that Eve experiences not one, but

²⁷⁹ Karen Edwards, "Resisting Representation: All About Milton's Eve," *Exemplaria* 9 (1997); Lee Morrissey, "Eve's Otherness and the New Ethical Criticism," *New Literary History* 32, no. 2 (2001).

²⁸⁰ Sandra M. Gilbert, "Patriarchal Poetry and Women Readers: Reflections on Milton's Bogey," *PMLA* 93, no. 3 (1978).

²⁸¹ Wittreich, *Feminist Milton*, x.

²⁸² Gilbert: 368.

²⁸³ A complete defence of my position that *Paradise Lost* is an essentially masculinist text that nevertheless expresses the poly-vocality of its culture would, unfortunately, require an immense digression from the focus of this project on the dreams of women; therefore, I must leave that task for another time.

two dreams in Milton's epic. The completely narrated first dream, given to her by Satan, is the one examined most frequently by critics and is the one addressed in the scholarship listed here, but the second, in which Eve learns of her role in salvation history, will also figure into my argument. Opinions regarding the theological significance of Eve's first dream include the position taken by some that it provides evidence that Eve is fallen before she ever consciously encounters Satan and the contradictory stance taken by others that the dream proves Eve's prelapsarian innocence. Millicent Bell, for example, has argued that "Eve's dream [in Book 4] already moves her across the border this side of innocence," while Stanley Fish insists that it reveals instead Eve's "virtuous mind" and Satan's inability to "make Eve go through the motions of disobedience, even in her fancy."²⁸⁴ Critics commenting on the dream's literary and historical significance, rather than its theological meaning, have demonstrated equally varied opinions. Murray W. Bundy points out the classical sources of Eve's dream, noting that "Milton inherited the dream as an epic device" and that the "dream, often personified, stood at the head of the sleeper" in much the same way that Satan, posing as a toad, squats at Eve's head and causes her to dream.²⁸⁵ William B. Hunter, Jr. asserts that Milton bases most of the dreams in *Paradise Lost* in rabbinical and medieval dream theories but locates the basis of Eve's dream in early modern demonology, while John Steadman focuses on the flight fantasy described in Eve's dream as evidence that Milton's frame of reference was contemporary characterizations of witchcraft and the witches' Sabbath.²⁸⁶ When critics focus on psychological interpretations of

²⁸⁴ Millicent Bell, "The Fallacy of the Fall in *Paradise Lost*," *PMLA* 68, no. 4 (1953): 867; Stanley Eugene Fish, *Surprised by Sin: The Reader in "Paradise Lost"* (London: MacMillan, 1967), 222. Fish further asserts that any reading similar to Bell's is either "careless" or "a (willful) distortion" (220).

²⁸⁵ Murray W. Bundy, "Eve's Dream and the Temptation in *Paradise Lost*," *Research Studies of the State College of Washington* (1942): 273.

²⁸⁶ William B. Hunter Jr, "Prophetic Dreams and Visions in *Paradise Lost*," *Modern Language Quarterly* 9 (1948); William B. Hunter Jr, "Eve's Demonic Dream," *ELH* 13, no. 4 (1946); John M. Steadman, "Eve's Dream and the Conventions of Witchcraft," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 26, no. 4 (1965).

Eve's dream, the results are similarly diverse, ranging from grounding the dream exclusively in early modern faculty psychology, which generally indicates a belief "that the soul is endowed with a number of powers—reasoning remembering, and judging, for example—and . . . explains the specific performances of the mind in terms of the exercise of these powers," to reading it as a Freudian wish fulfillment fantasy.²⁸⁷ Although the diversity of opinions regarding Eve's dream demonstrate the wide variety of critical perspectives brought to bear on the work more than they do the instabilities of early modern theories of dreaming, the lack of a stable definition of the meaning and source of dreams in the Renaissance provides an ideal opening for such a multiplicity of interpretive possibilities. Some of these analyses of Eve's dream take early modern dream theory into account, but none explores the significance Eve's dream in light of the patterns that women's dreams tend to follow in other masculine texts. In this chapter I argue that Milton's monism drives his revision of conventional masculinist portrayals of dreaming women, which are based in dualism, and that the discursive instabilities inherent in theories of early modern dream theory and female ontology make this subversion possible in a work otherwise committed to a general masculinist agenda.

5.3 A Toad at Eve's Ear

Eve's first dream, and the one that garners the vast majority of critical attention, is presented from three distinct points of view in Books 4 and 5: the narrator's, Eve's, and Adam's. First, the narrator describes Satan's entry into the garden, his stalking of the first couple, and finally his initial attack, in the form of a forged dream, on God's most recent creation. The angels Ithuriel and Zephor arrest Satan in the bower of Adam and Eve, where

²⁸⁷ Bundy, for example, gives a strong exposition of the working out of early modern faculty psychology in Eve's dream, while Manfred Weidhorn directly states that Eve's dream is a Freudian wish-fulfillment. Manfred Weidhorn, *Dreams in Seventeenth-Century English Literature* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), 149; Bundy.

. . . him there they found
Squat like a Toad, close at the eare of *Eve*;
Assaying by his Devilish art to reach
The Organs of her Fancie, and with them forge
Illusions as he list, Phantasms, and Dreams,
Or, if, inspiring venom, he might taint
Th' animal Spirits that from pure blood arise
Like gentle breaths from Rivers pure, thence raise
At least distempered, discontented thoughts,
Vaine hopes, vaine aims, inordinate desires
Blown up with high conceits ingendring pride. (4.799-809)

This third-person account of Satan's efforts demonstrates Milton's familiarity with and use of early modern faculty psychology based on Galenic physiology as well as the literary dream tradition.²⁸⁸ Robert A. Erickson notes that Milton would have been familiar with Galenic physiological and psychological theories from his days at Cambridge.²⁸⁹ Galen "complicated the Aristotelian notion of the soul and heart by having nature rule the body in his reinvention of the Platonic doctrine of three souls . . . simultaneously governing yet serving the body."²⁹⁰ The three faculties in Galen's formulation were the animal (from Latin *anima* or soul, rational, seated in the brain), the vital (emotional or passionate, seated in the heart), and the natural (physically

²⁸⁸ For a complete reading of the dream episode in terms of early modern faculty psychology, see Bundy. For a complete reading of the dream from the perspective of early modern physiology as influenced by Galenic ideas of the spirits, see Benet. Benet also notes two instances of men subjected to diabolical dreams in early modern literature, Richard Crashaw's translation of Marino's *Sospetto d'Herode* and Cowley's *Davideis*. In each case, an agent of Satan uses a snake to poison the mind of the dreamer, making his subsequent crimes inevitable. Notably, in each case the demon is sent by Satan to destroy the man and his victims by means of a dream, and in each case that demon is female (42-43). Even though these are men's dreams, the persistence of the association with women and deceptive, diabolical dreaming is remarkable.

²⁸⁹ Robert A. Erickson, *The Language of the Heart, 1600-1750* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 90.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

desiring, nutritive, seated in the liver).²⁹¹ Over time the three simple Galenic faculties were complicated with additional sub-divisions including the Fancy, or imagination, and the Will, though Reason remained at the top of the faculty hierarchy. According to early modern faculty psychology, Satan's assault on Eve's Fancy is a scheme to overthrow her Reason through an appeal to sensory appetites so that her Will might be persuaded to choose evil over good.²⁹² As the senses and appetites are aspects of the body and Fancy, Reason, and Will are aspects of the animal soul, this reading upholds dualism and the great divide between matter and spirit.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Originating with Plato, systematized by Aristotle, complicated by Galen, and reconciled with Christian conceptions of sin and will by Aquinas, this psychology presents a systematic and hierarchical division of powers of the soul. For some philosophers the various powers are understood to work in general harmony, but from a dualist Christian perspective the lower faculties are like wayward children in need of constant supervision and discipline by the higher faculties. Where the higher faculties have been brought under God's governance, inclinations to sin continue to operate in the lower faculties and often, as with traditional misogynist portrayals of the Fall, overthrow the higher faculties to which they should be subordinate as Eve overthrows her head Adam through sensuality and seduction. Such conceptions of psychology reinforce a dualist distrust of body and matter as fallen, sinful, and eternally dangerous to the Reason and Will, faculties associated with spirituality rather than corporeality. Milton's monism does not reject the "division of labor" in the workings of the body and soul suggested by faculty psychology, but it does reject the idea that Christian regeneration is somehow limited to the higher faculties. He sees Christian regeneration as applicable to the whole person, with higher and lower faculties working together harmoniously under the supervision of Reason. The analogical understanding of masculine correspondence to the higher faculties and feminine correspondence to the lower, which supports misogyny and reifies temptation and sin in the body of woman, is necessarily undercut by a monist belief system. Nevertheless, it is important to note that "during the Renaissance several theories as to the faculties of the mind" offered various views on the exact make up of and relationships between the various powers of the soul. Ruth Leila Anderson, *Elizabethan Psychology and Shakespeare's Plays* (New York: Haskell House, 1964), 16. For more detail on Galenic medicine in general, see Nutton.

While Milton certainly would have understood and expected his audience to comprehend the hierarchy of faculty psychology involved in Satan's attack, his own monistic stance seems irreconcilable with the dualism this reading demands. Ken Hiltner quite rightly maintains that it is Satan who offers the dualistic argument in both this dream and the real temptation that results in the Fall. According to Hiltner, only Satan and his minions, not God and not Milton, see the world in dualistic terms, and the real Fall is the result of Eve's acceptance of dualism: her attempt to transcend Earth and the body by becoming like God.²⁹³ Diane McColley's contention that unfallen Eve's "Fancie" was not "immune to temptation" and that her "waking will" rejects the enticement she feels in her dream is not inconsistent with this reading. As McColley herself observes, "Milton vehemently opposed the notion of a dual creation."²⁹⁴ In the description that she gives of her dream, Eve confirms its appeal to her lower faculties, asserting that in the dream the fruit "seem'd / Much Fairer to my Fancie then by day" (5.52-3). According to McColley, Milton's monism does not reject the existence of the faculties of Reason, Will, Fancy, or Appetite, but implies the belief that in unfallen man and regenerate Christians the lower faculties should not be separated from or contending with the higher. Instead, the lower faculties should function in unity with the higher. Fancy, then, "when it is working properly . . . [is] the servant of reason."²⁹⁵ Granting this argument and rejecting the notion that somehow at the time of the dream Eve is already fallen, we understand that it is Satan, not Milton, who believes and

²⁹³ Hiltner: 70-73.

²⁹⁴ Diane McColley, "Eve's Dream," in *Milton Studies*, ed. James D. Simmonds (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979), 27, 31.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 39. In fairness, I must observe that Murray Bundy and others have read Eve's dream in terms of faculty psychology and have come to the exact opposite conclusion. Bundy, for example, argues that "the dream and its 'interpretation' are indicative of Milton's conviction that . . . [Adam and Eve have no] absolute goodness. . . . The evil was potentially in psychological conditions of which Satan had angelic knowledge. . . . we are studying Eve's fancy as it directs her appetite even at the moment when she *seems* [but is not] wholly innocent."(Emphasis is my own.) Bundy: 291.

intends to make use of a dualistic understanding of faculty psychology. Satan's efforts, though, are destined to fail because in her unfallen state, the "Organs of her Fancie," her senses, and her appetites exist in harmonic unity with Eve's Reason and Will, and while Satan might attempt to use her body against her spirit, he cannot succeed. Such an interpretation agrees in spirit with the argument of Thomas Nashe in "Terrors of the Night" that

It is not to be gainsaid but the devil can transform himself into an angel of light, appear in the day as well as in the night; but not in this subtle world of Christianity so usual as before. If he do, it is when men's minds are extraordinarily thrown down with discontent, or inly terrified with some horrible concealed murder or other heinous crime close-smothered in secret.²⁹⁶

According to Nashe, then, devils do go about in disguise trying to tempt and destroy the faithful. He makes clear, however, that the regenerate Christian, like the unfallen Eve, may be assailed by devils in his sleep, but he is capable of resisting diabolical machinations unless something else is seriously amiss in his soul, such as an unconfessed sin or horrific secret guilt, either of which would represent an already present disruption of the orderly and unified function of the higher and lower faculties.

This first dream narration also aligns Satan's attack with early modern physiology based on Galen's description of the "spirits," which was the foundation of many early modern medical theories. Physiologically, for Galen spirits refer to substances, sometimes thought of as humors, flowing through the body.²⁹⁷ These physical substances were inextricably bound to both physical and psychological health. Natural, vital, and animal spirits were believed to circulate through the body. The animal spirits were those most closely associated with the soul, acting as

²⁹⁶ Nashe, 147-48.

²⁹⁷ The conflation of terms from ancient, early modern, and contemporary contexts makes this point particularly difficult, but thinking of the Galenic "spirits" as humours can be helpful, especially if we recall the early modern association between humoral health and psychological health represented by Hamlet. The so called "melancholy Dane" is believed by some to be a depiction of someone suffering from depression due to an excess of black bile, *melancholia*. Thus, Hamlet's physiological "spiritual" imbalance affected his psychological health.

a sort of liminal space where communication between the body and soul could occur.²⁹⁸ If the animal spirits were corrupted, the soul's ability to correctly reason and choose action could be affected. Diana Trevino Benet argues that because Milton is committed to the idea of free will, Satan's attempt to infect the sleeping Eve's mind through the animal spirits is a failure, as evidenced by her dismayed response to the dream and by the narrator's assurances that she remains, like Adam, "innocent" in its aftermath (5.209).²⁹⁹ Benet argues that although Satan is attributed with the ability to corrupt the animal spirits by both early modern science and theology, Milton's theology of free will would not permit Satan, in effect, to force someone to sin and risk his or her immortal spirit/soul by poisoning his animal spirit. The peculiar nature of the animal spirits, which are part of the body and also (somehow) in close communion with the spirit/soul, presents a conundrum: does acceptance of the "science" of animal spirits imply a dualistic or monistic theology? If animal spirits are understood to imply dualism, then an effect similar to that we have seen regarding faculty psychology is at work here: from Satan's point of view, this attack on Eve's body via her animal spirits in an attempt to corrupt her separate and otherwise unassailable immortal spirit/soul is destined to fail because she is not "divided" in this way. If, however, the animal spirits facilitate monism by unifying the body and the soul through a common medium of interaction, then Satan's failure is equally certain. His misidentification of Eve as a divided being renders fruitless his attempt to attack one part of her through the other; Eve is impervious to the physiology behind Satan's attempt to deceive her in a dream, even if, or perhaps because, she finds the dream disturbing. If we rightly understand Milton to be a monist, then his allusions to early modern faculty psychology and physiology in the account of the Toad at Eve's ear undercut the dualism intrinsic to early modern dream theory and render harmless its conventional use to discredit or vilify women

²⁹⁸ Benet: 40-41.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*: 49.

Next, this first narrated description of Satan's attempt to deceive Eve situates the attack in literary traditions regarding dreaming. The classical dream standing at the head of the dreamer, as Murray W. Bundy and Manfred Weidhorn have pointed out, seems to be one of Milton's literary reference points here.³⁰⁰ Weidhorn argues that the classical dream and its successors, on which Milton is drawing, were narrative devices designed to provide motivation or explanation for otherwise inexplicable action on the parts of characters. He admits, however, that Eve's first dream is neither motivational nor compulsory—that, indeed, her reaction to the dream reinforces her freedom of will, and he suggests that Milton uses his classical model as a warning device for Adam and Eve instead of "inserting the dream crudely as a motivating factor."³⁰¹ Weidhorn does not address the effect of gender on the device nor the fact that in the classical and early modern analogues he cites, all of the dreamers are male (with the exception of Penelope, whose dream is prophetic rather than motivational) and, often, the force supplying the dream is female. While I have no doubt that the classical epic dream, like every other element of epic convention, influenced Milton in some way, Weidhorn's suggestion that Eve's dream follows the classical model is undone by his examination of its differences from that formulaic device. Milton's dreaming woman, then, has less in common with the male dreamers in his classical sources than with other examples of female dreamers in English literature.

For a literary tradition of Eve dreaming, Milton did not need to venture back to classical conventions at all. In his exhaustive examination of various Genesis traditions and their possible influence on *Paradise Lost*, J. M. Evans suggests that Cyprian's *Heptateuchos* or the Old English *Genesis B* could have furnished a source for Milton's inclusion of Eve's dream. J. W. Lever has noted the poet's acquaintance with Franciscus Junius, who published *Genesis B* in 1655, and the possibility that Milton may have, though blind at the time of publication, had some

³⁰⁰ Manfred Weidhorn, "Eve's Dream and the Literary Tradition," *Tennessee Studies in Literature* 12 (1967): 41-42. Also see Bundy.

³⁰¹ Weidhorn, "Eve's Dream and the Literary Tradition," 49.

familiarity with the Old English poem, and Evans has observed significant similarities between the two texts.³⁰² The marked parallels between Eve's account of her dream and the account of the vision provided to Eve by Satan in *Genesis B* include Satan's appearance to Eve in angelic disguise, his promise to her that she will see heaven if she eats the fruit, and his delivery on that promise with an ethereal experience in which Eve can see the expanse of Earth and all its beauty. While the interesting question of whether Milton knew *Genesis B* or used it as a source can never finally be answered, the other dreaming women in English literature discussed in previous chapters also provide a literary tradition into which Eve's dream may be situated. We can, for example, see that Satan squatting as a Toad at Eve's ear is not far removed from the demon whispering his deception into the ear of Pilate's wife as depicted in many English dramatic and poetic retellings of the gospel. As the dreams given to Pilate's wife were devilish attempts to thwart the crucifixion and end the salvation narrative, this dream is a devilish attempt to overthrow God's creation and subvert His divine plan. The literary trope of a dreamer influenced by a supernatural force occurs in various literary traditions that Milton would almost certainly have known in some form, and, if the poet had been a slavish follower of anti-feminist tradition, we would likely expect such a dream whispered into the ear of Eve either to lead directly to an attempt by Eve to deceive Adam or to function as a warning of Adam's coming and inescapable downfall. Because this first description of Eve's dream gives us no insight into the dream's content or its effects on the couple, however, all we can deduce for certain from it is that through the interference of Ithuriel and Zephon, Milton aborts the conventional depiction of a woman receiving a diabolical dream before it can be completed; thus, on at least a narrative level Milton subverts the anti-feminist tradition that would allow Eve to be deceived by Satan in her dream and to become the deceiver of Adam as a result. Here Milton's depiction of a dreaming woman differs markedly from the depiction of the dreaming Eve in *Genesis B*, as it

³⁰² J. W. Lever, "Paradise Lost and the Anglo-Saxon Tradition," *The Review of English Studies* 23, no. 90 (1947); Evans, *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition*.

does from the various depictions of the dream of Pilate's wife in medieval literature. Where these earlier women dreamers listen to the messages of the demons who bring false visions and pass the deceptions on to their mates, Eve is prevented from even hearing all that Satan might have whispered in her ear by the intervention of the angels. In spite of the angels' efforts, though, Eve is not spared the experience of at least part of a demonic dream, and both the content of the dream and her reaction to it are as vital to our understanding of Milton's monistic portrayal as is the method of its delivery. For insight into the content and effects of Eve's first dream, however, we must wait for the second account, given in Book 5. This second account continues to challenge conventions of misogyny surrounding the depiction of the woman dreamer detectable in the brief portrayal of the Toad at Eve's ear.

5.4 Unquiet Rest

The account that Eve gives of her dream in Book 5 counters anti-feminist portrayals of women dreamers by demonstrating her innocence and the failure of the diabolical dream to control her—even if she is a woman. After the angels have caught Satan at Eve's ear and banished him from the bower, Book 4 soon draws to a close. At the opening of Book 5 Adam awakes to find Eve still asleep, "With Tresses discompos'd, and glowing Cheek, / As through unquiet rest" (10-11). Although Adam rouses her gently, Eve wakes with a start, grabs at Adam, and expresses her relief at finding that what she has just experienced was not real. She then relates the content of her dream:

". . . I this Night,
Such night till this I never pass'd, have dream'd,
If dream'd, not as I oft am wont, of thee,
Works of day pass't, or morrows next designe,
But of offense and trouble, which my mind
Knew never till this irksom night; methought
Close at mine ear one call'd me forth to walk
With gentle voice, I thought it thine; it said,
Why sleepest thou *Eve*? now is the pleasant time,
The cool, the silent, save where silence yields
To the night-warbling Bird, that now awake
Tunes sweetest his love-labor'd song; now reignes
Full Orb'd the Moon, and with more pleasing light
Shadowie sets off the face of things; in vain,

If none regard; Heav'n wakes with all his eyes,
 Whom to behold but thee, Natures desire,
 In whose sight all things joy, with ravishment
 Attracted by thy beauty still to gaze.
 I rose as at thy call, but found thee not;
 To find thee I directed then my walk;
 And on, methought, alone I pass'd through ways
 That brought me on a sudden to the Tree
 Of interdicted Knowledge: fair it seem'd,
 Much fairer to my Fancie then by day:
 And as I wondring lookt, beside it stood
 One shap'd and wing'd like one of those from Heav'n
 By us oft seen; his dewie locks distill'd
Ambrosia; on that Tree he also gaz'd;
 And O fair Plant, said he, with fruit surcharg'd,
 Deigns none to ease thy load and taste thy sweet,
 Nor God, nor Man; is Knowledge so despis'd?
 Or envie, or what reserve forbids to taste?
 Forbid who will, none shall from me withhold
 Longer thy offerd good, why else set here?
 This said he paus'd not, but with ventrous Arme
 He pluckt, he tasted; mee damp horror chil'd
 At such bold words voucht with a deed so bold:
 But he thus overjoy'd, O Fruit Divine,
 Sweet of thy self, but much more sweet thus cropt,
 Forbid'n here, it seems, as onely fit
 For God's, yet able to make Gods of Men:
 And why not Gods of Men, since good, the more
 Communicated, more abundant grows,
 The Author not impair'd, but honourd more?
 Here, happie Creature, fair Angelic *Eve*,
 Partake thou also; happie though thou art,
 Happier thou mayst be, worthier canst not be:
 Taste this, and be henceforth among the Gods
 Thy self a Goddess, not to Earth confin'd,
 But sometimes in the Air, as wee, sometimes
 Ascend to Heav'n, by merit thine, and see
 What life the Gods live there, and such live thou.
 So saying, he drew nigh, and to me held,
 Even to my mouth of that same fruit held part
 Which he had pluckt; the pleasant savourie smell
 So quick'nd appetite, that I, methought,
 Could not but taste. Forthwith up to the Clouds
 With him I flew, and underneath beheld
 The Earth outstretcht immense, a prospect wide
 And various: wondring at my flight and change
 To this high exaltation; suddenly
 My Guide was gon, and I, me thought, sunk down,
 And fell asleep; but O how glad I wak'd
 To find this but a dream! " (5.30-93)

The patriarchal language of misogyny saturates this dream report. The tempter's appeals to Eve's vanity and pride as well as to her appetite are anti-feminist commonplaces based in body/spirit dualism, as is his appeal to envy. Juan Louise Vives, for instance, asserts that "shameful as it is for women to the point of absurdity, in some strange way [envy] afflicts that sex relentlessly."³⁰³ In fact, the tempter's last and (presumably) most powerful suggestion to Eve before placing the fruit at her lips is to an envious desire to be like the angels, "not to Earth confind," but able to "Ascend to Heaven . . . and see / What life the Gods live there, and such live Thou" (5.78-81). Like the narrative account of the toad at Eve's ear, the description Eve gives of her dream has analogues in other masculine texts of dreaming women in which the misogynistic assumptions of the tempter are upheld by the response of the woman to the temptation. Indeed, *Genesis B* offers a strikingly similar account of a temptation of Eve. Examination of this analogue alongside the account from *Paradise Lost* reveals Milton's ability simultaneously to deploy and disrupt the anti-feminism so prominent in masculine texts where the unstable cultural languages of dreaming and women intersect.

The numerous similarities between the temptation of Eve in *Genesis B* and her dream in Book 5 of *Paradise Lost* tend to highlight the importance of their differences. Satan's appearance as an angel of light, his promise that eating the forbidden fruit will allow Eve to see heaven, and the heavenly vision he provides, as already noted, are striking correspondences between *Genesis B* and Eve's first dream in *Paradise Lost*. While Eve's experience in *Genesis B* is a daytime waking vision, however, the dream of Eve in *Paradise Lost* is given to her at night while she is asleep and relatively more vulnerable, and combines a night temptation tradition not present in *Genesis B* with the pattern of associating women's dreams and visions with diabolical origins that is present in the earlier poem.³⁰⁴ As I explained in Chapter 2, in

³⁰³ Vives, 118.

³⁰⁴ As a waking vision, Eve's dream in *Genesis B* is qualitatively but not substantially different from Eve's sleeping dream in *Paradise Lost*. The diabolical origin of the vision, moreover, robs it of any relatively

Genesis B Eve receives her vision at the time of the Fall, and it is offered for two reasons: as a token of good faith, proof that the demon's promises to her were true, and as a means of persuading Adam to eat the fruit. In *Genesis B* the temptation is built on the woman's positive qualities, including her fear of God's wrath and her loyalty to Adam, as well as on her negative desires, including a desire to influence her husband and a desire to see the throne of God. Pride and envy partially motivate her choice to violate God's command, but the fiend also uses her virtues to lead her to ruin. The deception of Eve by the fiend and his manufactured vision are followed by Eve's deception of Adam; and the narrator's excuses for Eve, that she "*Heo dyde hit þeah þurh holdne hyge*" (she did it though through a loyal heart) and that "*hæfde hire wacran hige / metod gemearcod*" (God had marked her with a weaker mind), do not effectively alleviate her guilt for being deceived and becoming part of the deception cycle that leads to Adam's fall (708, 590-91).

The differences in timing, motivational power, and outcome between Milton's version of Eve's dream and that in *Genesis B* demonstrate the tendency of *Paradise Lost* to "burst. . . through the repressions it inscribes," as Wittreich puts it.³⁰⁵ Unlike Eve's vision in *Genesis B*,

greater authority that a divine waking vision might have over a divinely inspired sleeping dream. I do not mention these similarities to suggest that *Genesis B* was Milton's source for the episode, although it seems strange to insist that Milton had no knowledge of the earlier text given that, in addition to other striking similarities, according to Evans *Paradise Lost* and *Genesis B* are the only two "works which contain the idea of Eve's diabolical vision *and* the idea that the Tempter masqueraded as an angel." Regardless of whether Milton drew on *Genesis B*, other sources may also have impacted Milton's version of the event. Evans, for example, has also demonstrated that the concept of Eve experiencing temptation at night is one variation on the Genesis narrative found in several versions of the story. He describes two of these that suggest the possibility of a dream for Eve: the "rabbinic idea that the Devil tempted Eve while Adam was deep in a post-coital slumber" and "Cyprian's version of the temptation, according to which the Tempter approached Eve during the night." Evans, *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition*, 254-55.

³⁰⁵ Wittreich, *Feminist Milton*, 69.

Eve's dream in *Paradise Lost* is given well in advance of the actual Fall, and though it may be intended to serve as a warning to Adam and Eve, as Weidhorn asserts, it shares very little with the Fall other than the reptilian presence of Satan and the enticing fruit of the tree.³⁰⁶ Rather than allowing Eve's dream directly to motivate the Fall, Milton separates it from that tragedy and uses it to reinforce the innocence and moral sufficiency of prelapsarian Eve.³⁰⁷ Similarly, the power of the dream to induce Eve to sin is significantly lacking compared to the motivational strength of the vision the fiend grants Eve in *Genesis B*. While the false angel in Eve's dream attempts to appeal to the stereotypical female vices of vanity and envy, Eve's account does not indicate that these devices have any effect on her whatsoever; moreover, rather than providing fodder for the fiend to use against her, Eve's virtues are part of her innocent state and in no way useful to Satan in his attack. What does entice her in the *Paradise Lost* dream, the "pleasant, savorie smell," appeals to her appetite, but even then no final determination of whether she actually tastes the dream fruit or only has it held to her mouth by the false angel can be made. Eve says, "I, methought, / Could not but taste," indicating not the actual act of tasting the fruit, but only a dreamlike sense of compulsion to do so (5.86-7). Rather than allowing a woman's dream to reinforce the anti-feminist stereotype, Milton demonstrates through her dream report that traditional feminine vices are either absent in Eve or essentially powerless over her.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁶ Weidhorn, "Eve's Dream and the Literary Tradition," 49.

³⁰⁷ For excellent, varied, and complex arguments supporting this claim, see Benet; Hiltner; McColley, "Eve's Dream."; McColley, *Milton's Eve*; Wittreich, *Feminist Milton*; Wittreich, "'Inspired with Contradiction': Mapping Gender Discourses in *Paradise Lost*."

³⁰⁸ Indeed, at the time of the Fall, it is the serpent's deceptive sophistry, not his flattery and much more than his appeal to envy, that (along with the "smell / So savorie of that Fruit") sways Eve "With Reason, to her seeming, and with Truth" (9.740-41, 738). Even here the monist Milton is in evidence, for Eve's appetite is stimulated, but it is not the cause of her fall. Her hunger "wak'd / An eager appetite, rais'd by the smell," but it is only when "to her self she mus'd," i.e. exercises her deceived reason, that she chooses to

Significantly, the only effective temptation here is one that appeals to Eve's bodily desires. Misogynistic body/spirit dualism would demand that Eve succumb to this enticement because her alignment with the body renders her a veritable slave to rapacious physical desires of all kinds. From Milton's monist stance, however, Eve's bodily appetite is not evidence of an evil nature but instead is controlled by Reason as part of the unified creation that is human. Although he includes features that closely parallel the situation in *Genesis B*, where Eve's corporeality and susceptibility to the influence of the diabolical dream reinforce the anti-feminism and dualism of patriarchal discourse, Milton's portrayal of Eve's dream report subverts misogyny through her righteous and natural resistance to the evil dream. Milton's Eve is neither ruled by her appetite nor vulnerable to appeals to vanity and pride, as either flaw would tend to reinforce traditional dualistic understandings of the mother of mankind as a bodily rather than spiritual being and an imperfect creation of insufficient virtue. Instead, she demonstrates a union of body and spirit in which proper relations between the faculties are maintained.

Like the differences in timing and motivational power of the dream and the vision, differences between the aftermath of Eve's dream in *Paradise Lost* and the aftermath of Eve's vision in *Genesis B* demonstrate Milton's revision of the traditional association of women's dreams to deception and danger for men. Immediately flying away with Satan after the touch of the fruit to her lips, Milton's Eve sees the "Earth outstretcht immense, a prospect wide / And various," and this is all she reports of the visionary aspect of her dream when she describes it to Adam (5.88). What Eve sees in the *Genesis B* vision is remarkably similar:

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | <i>þa meahte heo wide geseon</i> |
| <i>þurh þæs laðan læn</i> | <i>þe hie mid ligenum beswac,</i> |
| <i>dearnenga bedrog</i> | <i>þe hire for his dædum com,</i> |
| <i>þæt hire þuhte hwitre</i> | <i>heofon and eorðe</i> |
| <i>and eall þeos woruld wlitigre</i> | <i>and geweorc godes</i> |
| <i>micel and mihtig. (600-05)</i> | |

sin (9.739-40, 44). Her appetite and thus her "bodiliness" do not cause her fall except inasmuch as they operate in unified service to her reason.

(Then could she see widely because of the fiend's gift with which he betrayed her through lies and insidiously beguiled her, then because of his deed it came to pass that the heavens and earth seemed brighter to her and all of this world more radiant and all God's great and mighty work.)

However, when Eve reports this vision to Adam, she describes seeing the throne of God and the angels (666-69). Unlike the *Genesis B* Eve, who appears to deceptively embellish her vision in her report to Adam and who insists (as she truly but perhaps arrogantly believes) that it has been brought to her directly from God, Milton's Eve expresses only wonder at her "flight and / Change to this high exaltation" (5.90-1). While Eve's dream in *Paradise Lost* is deceptive, her penitent reaction to it indicates that she is not actually deceived, and following her dream Eve does not become a part of the cycle of deception that the *Genesis B* Eve and so many other dreaming women in masculine texts do. Although the traditional association of dreaming woman with deception is not entirely eliminated, Eve's honesty in the aftermath of her diabolical dream demonstrates both her bodily purity and her spiritual competence to resist temptation and deceit.³⁰⁹ Moreover, Eve's continued innocence and virtue in the aftermath of her diabolical dream subvert the early modern paradigm linking women's dreams to harm for men. Although she experiences a deceptive, diabolical dream, neither she nor Adam falls as a result of its

³⁰⁹ Even at the time of the Fall when Eve is deceived by the artful lies of Satan and does enter the cycle of deception by misleading Adam, Milton breaks with anti-feminist tradition because Eve does not bear the guilt for Adam's fall along with her own. In *Paradise Lost* the cycle of deception is not completed. Deceived by Satan, Eve becomes artful, dissembles, and even lies outright, but Adam is "not deceav'd" (9.998). Having heard Eve's story of her own disastrous choice, Adam sees perfectly clearly what has really happened: "som cursed fraud / Of Enemie hath beguiled thee," and he makes his own decision to sin fully understanding what has occurred: "with thee / Certain my resolution is to Die" (9.904-07). Whatever misogyny he may spout at Eve later and whatever blame he may attempt to assign to her, Adam bears his own guilt.

deceptive power.³¹⁰ Milton's separation of this dream from Eve's and thus from Adam's true fall severs the conventional tie between women's dreams and men's destruction through Eve's virtuously unified body and spirit.

5.5 Of Evil Whence?

After Eve has related the content of her dream along with her distress over it, Adam undertakes to interpret this unexpected discord in the couple's heretofore unblemished peace and joy, and it is only at this point that Milton allows the ambiguities of early modern dream theory to inject uncertainty and confusion into the narrative:

"Best Image of my self and dearer half,
The trouble of thy thoughts this night in sleep
Affects me equally; nor can I like
This uncouth dream, of evil sprung I fear;
Yet evil whence? in thee can harbour none,
Created pure. But know that in the Soule
Are many lesser Faculties that serve
Reason as chief; among these Fancies next
Her office holds; of all external things,
Which the five watchful Senses represent,

³¹⁰ William Empson's argument that this dream and the warning visit of Raphael are actually what induce the Fall, thus making God ultimately responsible for the sin of Adam and Eve, is unconvincing on a variety of grounds. First, of course, is the fact that Milton says precisely the opposite in the "Argument" to Book 5. In addition, Empson freely, and cheerfully, admits that he "think[s] the traditional God of Christianity very wicked" in the first ten pages of his book and makes the clear point that his agenda for the project is to prove that Milton thought so, too. Because his approach is so pointedly ideological, Empson could hardly come to any conclusion except that God is the cause of the Fall, no matter what the evidence might suggest to the contrary; therefore, his argument fails to persuade me. John S. Tanner makes a far more cogent argument for attributing some of the power of the temptation to Raphael's visit because it introduces the first couple to the alluring possibility of disobedience. Based on reading Milton through Lewis's lens, however, this argument still fails to fully convince me that in *Paradise Lost* itself the angelic warning is the impetus for the Fall. William Empson, *Milton's God* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965), 10, 147-181; John S. Tanner, "The Psychology of Temptation in *Paradise Lost*: What C. S. Lewis Learned from Milton," *Renaissance* 52, no. 2 (2000).

She forms Imaginations, Aerie shapes,
 Which Reason joyning or disjoyning, frames
 All what we affirm or what deny, and call
 Our knowledge or opinion; then retires
 Into her private Cell when Nature rests.
 Oft in her absence mimic Fancies wakes
 To imitate her; but misjoyning shapes,
 Wilde work produces oft, and most in dreams,
 Ill matching words and deeds long past or late.
 Som such resemblances methinks I find
 Of our last Eevenings talk, in this thy dream,
 But with addition strange; yet be not sad.
 Evil into the mind of God or Man
 May come and go, so unapprov'd, and leave
 No spot or blame behind: Which gives me hope
 That what in sleep thou didst abhor to dream,
 Waking thou never wilt consent to do." (5.95-128)

Where the first, narrated account addressed only the true diabolical source of the dream and Eve's report addressed only its troubling content, here Adam endeavors to account for the dream's source and content through analysis. Employing both dream theory and early modern faculty psychology to explain and interpret Eve's dream for her, Adam's attempt at clarification is impeded by the dualism of both discourses and instead reproduces their instabilities. Noting that "Fancies wakes" to produce "Wilde work" while its governor Reason sleeps, Adam hints at the possibility of a division between the lower faculties and the higher characterized by opposition. His oblique suggestion is that, during sleep, in its desire to imitate rather than serve ruling Reason, Fancy produces a twisted parody of Reason's orderly creation, a situation faintly resembling Satan's desire to rule rather than serve God and the parody of heaven's hierarchy that he produces in hell. Further, even though Eve's dream contains a disturbing "addition strange," Adam determines that she has experienced an insignificant *somnium animale*, a dream from the middle class of medicalized medieval dream theory that is produced in sleep by the preoccupations of the waking mind. Of course, we learn in Book 8 that Adam has himself experienced two significant dreams of divine origin, which in the terminology of dream theory would be designated *somnia coeleste*, divinely inspired dreams. Adam reports that during his first sleep after his creation, a dream "suddenly stood at . . . [his] Head" that guided him to his

home in Paradise and that, although asleep during the creation of Eve, he has witnessed the procedure through a divine “trance” (8.292, 462). Aware as he is of the possibility of higher order, significant dreaming, Adam instantly, and quite wrongly, assumes that Eve’s dream is from a lower order and is therefore insignificant. Although it would be untenable to accuse Adam of engaging in a form dualistic misogyny by his automatic assumption that Eve’s dream is meaningless, however troubling the two of them find it, the hint of such dualism cannot be ignored. In the confusion produced by the instability of dream theory, Adam is unable rightly to identify or interpret Eve’s dream and dismisses it without further comment.

I have already argued that this dream is neither monitory nor motivational with regard to the Fall; therefore, I do not mean to assert here that Adam’s misreading of the dream results in his lack of caution in letting Eve go out alone to work, nor do I suggest that because he misinterprets the dream he fails to warn Eve adequately of the dangers that lie before her. With or without a proper dream interpretation, Adam and Eve are sufficiently warned by Raphael of the dangers of disobedience and the need to resist “all temptation to transgress” (8.643). What I do mean to demonstrate is that in Milton’s first two depictions of Eve’s first dream, he challenges the anti-feminist traditions surrounding dreaming women in masculine texts and that it is only Adam’s attempt to engage in the unstable discourse of dream theory that results in detectable confusion, dualism, and misogyny. Even when this woman experiences a diabolical dream, she is untainted by it; she does not enter into a cycle of deception, and her dream does not signal an inescapable doom for Adam. Further, in the acknowledgement of masculine attempts to depict and interpret women’s dreams for them found in Adam’s interpretation of Eve’s dream, Milton demonstrates the ineffectuality and the inexorable, even if unintentional, anti-feminism of these endeavors. While *Paradise Lost* primarily expresses a masculinist cultural language reinforcing traditional male dominance, the intersection of dream theory and female ontology in Eve’s first dream expresses a language that challenges misogynistic assumptions and asserts the essential, if not sociological or political, parity of the feminine and

the masculine. In this sense, *Paradise Lost* demonstrates a surprising degree of polyvocality for its time. This polyvocality can be traced to the monistic portrayal of Eve in her experience of and reaction to a demonic dream. Where other fictionalized dreaming women would through their spiritual insufficiency succumb to the deception in the dream and pass that deception on to men, the Eve of *Paradise Lost* is uniformly pure in both body and spirit and as capable as Adam is of controlling her bodily appetites through the faculty of Reason and of recognizing and resisting evil.

5.6 And Dreams Advise

Although Eve's second dream, alluded to in Book 11 but only actually reported at the very end of Book 12, is a prophetic counterpart to the waking vision given by Michael to Adam in the last two books of the work, it has received far less critical attention than any of the other dreams presented in *Paradise Lost*. Adam's two dreams, one experienced during his transfer to Paradise and one experienced at the creation of Eve, and Eve's first dream are all much more fully recounted and appear to be much more significant to the work than does this final dream.³¹¹ Reading this final dream in light of portrayals of other women's dreams in masculine texts of the Renaissance reveals the remarkable prominence Milton gives to language of feminine validation at the culmination of his otherwise masculinist narrative in which patriarchal hierarchy is unquestioned both before and after Fall.

The first suggestion that Eve may have a second dream occurs as Michael leads Adam up the hill of Paradise from which they will view "what shall come in future days" (11.357). The

³¹¹ In a fascinating (though hard to swallow) reading of Adam's account to Raphael of Eve's creation, Wittreich asserts that Adam's version is a "fiction so self-aggrandizing that Adam loses stature, not Eve." He notes several ways in which Adam's version contradicts God, the angels, and Eve. If one accepts Wittreich's reading here, this dream report by Adam reproduces in inverted form the medieval association of women's dreams and deception, making Adam, not Eve, the deceitful dreamer. Wittreich, "Inspired with Contradiction': Mapping Gender Discourses in *Paradise Lost*," 152-53.

angel instructs Adam to “let *Eve* (for I have drenched her eyes) / Here sleep below while thou to foresight wak’st, / As once thou slepst, while Shee to life was formd,” and although he does not directly reveal here that Eve will be given a dream, he suggests that her sleeping bears a chiasitic relationship to Adam’s account of sleeping and dreaming during the creation of Eve (11.367-68). The next reference to Eve’s second dream is found in the argument to Book 12, where the reader is informed that “Eve, who all this while had slept, . . . [had been] with gentle dreams compos’d to quietness of mind and submission.” Finally, as Book 12 draws to a close, Michael instructs Adam to “waken *Eve*; / Her also I with gentle Dreams have calm’d / Portending good” (595-97). When Adam arrives at the bower, however, Eve is already awake and reports to him “with words not sad” that “God is also in sleep, and Dreams advise / Which he hath sent propitious, some great good / Presaging” (12.609-13). Because she has experienced a dream of divine prophecy, Eve’s dream might be classified on the second to highest tier of the dream hierarchy, that of the *visio*. However, the last two words of her report, “good / Presaging,” suggest that Eve may instead have experienced a *somnium*, that middle class of dreams in which a prophecy or divine truth is imparted in an obscure or symbolic way so that interpretation is required. Regardless of which of these two classes her dream may occupy, by giving Eve this truth-bearing dream prophesying good, Milton has broken with anti-feminist tradition even more completely than he did in the depiction of her first dream, as this time a woman is given access to dreaming that, rather than being diabolically inspired and deceptive, is divine, significant, true, and portentous of nothing but benefit for all of mankind.³¹²

³¹² Shannon Miller claims that Eve’s final dream “enacts the passivity characterizing feminized prophetic experience” in line with the rash of essentially passive female prophets rising from the politically, socially, and theologically unstable middle years of the seventeenth-century. This assertion is valid in itself and in the terms of my thesis, as it demonstrates both the emergence of detectable cultural polyphony and the maintenance of masculinist ideological perceptions of passive femininity. Miller, *Engendering the Fall: John Milton and Seventeenth-Century Women Writers*, 93.

Milton goes further, for if she has had only a *somnium*, Eve has already been given any necessary translation from the mouth of the Son himself. Eve recalls Jesus's earlier pledge that has been reiterated in her dream that "By mee the Promis'd Seed shall all restore" (12.623). If Eve's first, diabolical dream required a masculine and incorrect interpretation from Adam (and there is no evidence that it actually did), no man is required to interpret this dream for Eve; she is able to interpret it herself because of her direct communion with God. Fallen though she is, Eve has essentially equal, even if qualitatively different, access to the truth of divine dreaming.

Because the logic of traditional dualistic discourses of dream theory and misogyny deny women, as non-spiritual, corporeal beings, access to inspired, meaningful dreams and visions, the theoretical significance of Eve's *somnium* or *visio* can hardly be overstated. Unafflicted by the instabilities rooted in the problematic dualisms of dream theory and misogynistic theories of the nature of women, Eve's final dream parallels Adam's waking vision and reinforces their essential equality of worth even after the Fall. We may recall that in theoretical dream hierarchies, the further a dream could be removed from bodily origins, the more valuable it became. Whether the dream was classified as *somnium coeleste* or an *oraculum*, the highest-level dreams were understood to be completely separated from the body of the dreamer. As a gift given by the angel Michael, Eve's dream is devoid of bodily connection and so rises nearly to the top tier of meaningful dream, though it is not of the highest form -- a waking vision. Conversely, the revelation given to Adam by Michael is a waking vision, but Milton makes a significant effort to tie this vision to Adam's physical body rather than to some entirely spiritual sight. In the economy of dream theory, the hierarchical difference between Eve's divine dream and Adam's waking vision is elided by the relative importance of the body to its delivery. After Michael and Adam have ascended the hill, the narrator describes how:

Michael from *Adam's* eyes the Filme remov'd
Which that false Fruit that promis'd clearer sight
Had bred; then purg'd with Euphrasie and Rue
The visual Nerve, for he had much to see;
And from the Well of Life three drops instill'd.
So deep the power of these Ingredients pierc'd,

Eevn to the inmost seat of mental sight
That *Adam* now enforc't to close his eyes,
Sunk down and all his Spirits became intrans:
But him the gentle Angel by the hand
Soon rais'd, and his attention thus recall'd.
Adam, now ope thine eyes, and first behold. (11.412-23)

Adam's physical eyes must be cleared and medicated to prepare him for his experience, as both Adam's body and spirit must be engaged for contemplation of the waking vision Michael has been instructed to provide. Further, lest we misunderstand this event as a spiritual production that has left the body behind, the narrator informs us that after Adam swoons and becomes entranced, Michael revives him and instructs him to open his eyes so that he can physically see the prophetic vision before him. Thus, Adam's vision may occupy a higher tier on the dream hierarchy, but it is attached to the body in ways that, as dream theory goes, force it into a more equal relation to Eve's lower tier dream than two such experiences would typically have. Eve's dream is not of the body, but Adam's is; thus, the woman's experience is equivalent to even if different from that of the man. Their relationship according to the patriarchal paradigm is unchanged because masculine authority remains unchallenged, but because their access to meaningful dreaming is equalized, both the man and the woman are understood to be unified, albeit fallen, bodies and spirits. As he does with so many other conventions, Milton has inscribed the dualism of dream theory on the text only to subvert it with his own monist stance, and in so doing he has also transformed its inherent anti-feminism into a validation of the feminine through Eve's second dream. Giving the final prophecy of coming redemption to Eve through her dream and the final statement of that prophecy – indeed the final spoken words of the epic – to her as well, Milton validates the feminine through his rehabilitation of the early modern misogynistic traditions of the woman dreamer.

5.7 Conclusion

While the antifeminist messages found in the masculine texts of women dreaming of Milton's medieval predecessors and his early modern counterparts were fissured by the complex of languages found at the intersection of dream theory and theories of woman, Milton's

rejection of the dualistic separation of matter and spirit that creates the instability and ambiguity of these discourses allows for genuine poly-vocality in *Paradise Lost*. Confronted with the cycle of deceit and damage to men offered by her diabolical dream experience and despite her part in the Fall, Eve neither becomes a part of the dream/deception cycle nor the dreadful harbinger of man's doom. This refusal of this text to heap eternal blame upon Eve and all of woman-kind allows for the harmonic presence of a cultural language of feminine validation along with the dominant language of masculine hegemony. Eve's final dream also demonstrates this cultural poly-vocality through the presentation of a woman who shares equal access to the transcendent truth available to masculine dreamers and is allowed the opportunity and authoritative voice to express this truth. Wittreich has asserted that a "leading premise for criticism [of Milton and *Paradise Lost* is] the contention that Milton speaks differently at different times, even on the same point."³¹³ The vast array of interpretations of Milton's attitudes towards women and of his portrayal of Eve seems to support this contention. I argue, however, that in addition to (and perhaps instead of) seeing in *Paradise Lost* a masterful weaving together of contradiction, we should acknowledge that especially in regard to gender this is a text in which the dominant masculinist discourse is not deployed in an effort to erase or even to cover over the complex of competing cultural languages. The overall result may appear to be a paradoxical combination of masculine hegemony and feminine agency, but Milton's reworking of traditional misogynistic portrayals of dreaming women according to his monistic paradigm powerfully demonstrates the open operation of discursive cultural complexity.

³¹³ Wittreich, *Feminist Milton*, 13.

AFTERWARD

Feminist readings of medieval and early modern texts that I was familiar with when I began my Ph.D. program seemed to follow one of two models: either they decried the complete suppression or erasure of female voices by a powerful masculinist cultural discourse or they focused on the recovery of solitary, yet defiant female voices that had somehow managed to survive the oppression that would silence them. I was somewhat surprised, then, as I began to analyze texts from the English Middle Ages and Renaissance in which women's dreams are reported to find that neither of these models fully supported. Rather than a simple and complete misogynistic suppression of cultural languages favorable to women, I found that such languages present themselves through the discontinuities that inevitably form in dualistic discourses, especially where two different dualism intersect. The discourse of female validation did not come, as I expected, from any individual woman's distant, defiant voice at all, but instead spontaneously emerged when I closely examined anti-feminist representations of dreaming women for their logical inconsistencies. Moreover, rather than finding the recovered female voices of opposition to oppression ringing out of the dream reports of real women that I had anticipated, I discovered instead that the dream reports of real women made powerful statements of feminine equality and agency while operating in cooperation with, rather than opposition to, masculine discourse. In these texts, rather than battling misogyny from without women's voices subverted misogyny from within, exposing the gap between anti-feminist "fundamental codes" and the theological interpretations that explained them.

I believe the implications of my findings are important for two reasons. First, they provide feminist readings of some familiar and other less familiar texts that both acknowledge and document the discourse of misogyny. Beyond that, these readings demonstrate that the dominance of this discourse was more fragile and fractured than we typically understand it to

have been during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. My readings are not intended to offer a rosy view on women's lives and experiences, but rather to suggest that the textual fabric of the medieval and early modern cultural discursive complexes challenged anti-feminism even when the women themselves could not actively do so because the discursive logic of masculine hegemony was always already marred by fissures that opened a space for a cultural language validating women. I believe that our understanding of texts from these periods can be deepened if we seek out such gaps and draw attention to what they reveal.

Second, I believe my work opens a space for rethinking the relationship between masculinist and feminist discourses. Their relationship need not always be understood as combative nor as one demonstrating colonializing or co-opting of the feminine by a dominant masculinity. Instead, we may find that in some cases discourse validating feminine power and agency is quite strong when it operates in what I call cooperation with masculinist discourse. The idea of cooperation functioning as a form of subversion may appear antithetical; however, I believe the issue here is one of agency. The subversive effect of the cooperation of discourses that I theorize need not be a product of conscious intent on the part of the woman but is instead an inevitable by-product of interactions between incompatible or illogical paradigms when they meet under certain over-determined conditions like those I describe in Chapter 4. In fact, I think the idea of cooperating discourses avoids the need to demonstrate that such situations were intentional on the part of the woman involved and preempts charges of anachronism that attribution of proto-feminist consciousness to women from the Middle Ages and Renaissance tend to generate. As I demonstrated in Chapter 4, cooperation does not imply that feminine discourse submits to the codes of anti-feminism, but rather that the two discourses combine in such a way that masculinist codes become inverted in favor of specific women while remaining largely unchanged for women in general. While such cooperation may provide models of sanctioned feminine agency to the culture at large, thus implying the possibility of their

replication and multiplication, it does nothing to diminish overall masculine hegemony. This is both its power and its weakness.

The implications I have just outlined may seem paradoxical, as even to me they suggest that feminist readings can demonstrate the conservation of masculinist ideology occurring simultaneously with challenges to misogyny and anti-feminism. Nevertheless, in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the corporeal woman who experienced significant, spiritual dreams and visions was a similarly paradoxical possibility, and yet, as we have seen, she existed both in literature and lived experience.

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