

## From On Christian Doctrine<sup>1</sup>

From Book One

### II

[2] All doctrine concerns either things or signs, but things are learned by signs. Strictly speaking, I have here called a "thing" that which is not used to signify something else, like wood, stone, cattle, and so on; but not that wood concerning which we read that Moses cast it into bitter waters that their bitterness might be dispelled,<sup>2</sup> nor that stone which Jacob placed at his head,<sup>3</sup> nor that beast which Abraham sacrificed in place of his son.<sup>4</sup> For these are things in such a way that they are also signs of other things.<sup>5</sup> There are other signs whose whole use is in signifying, like words. For no one uses words except for the purpose of signifying something. From this may be understood what we call "signs"; they are things used to signify something. Thus every sign is also a thing, for that which is not a thing is nothing at all; but not every thing is also a sign. And thus in this distinction between things and signs, when we speak of things, we shall so speak that, although some of them may be used to signify something else, this fact shall not disturb the arrangement we have made to speak of things as such first and of signs later. We should bear in mind that now we are to consider what things are, not what they signify beyond themselves.

From Book Two

### I

[1] Just as I began, when I was writing about things, by warning that no one should consider them except as they are, without reference to what they signify beyond themselves, now when I am discussing signs I wish it understood that no one should consider them for what they are but rather for their value as signs which signify something else. A sign is a thing which causes us to think of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes upon the senses. Thus if we see a track, we think of the animal that made the track; if we see smoke, we know that there is a fire which causes it; if we hear the voice of a living being, we attend to the emotion it expresses; and when a trumpet sounds, a soldier should know whether it is necessary to advance or to retreat, or whether the battle demands some other response.

[2] Among signs, some are natural and others are conventional. Those are natural which, without any desire or intention of signifying, make us aware of something beyond themselves, like smoke which signifies fire. It does this without any will to signify, for even when smoke appears alone, observation and memory of experience with things bring a recognition of an underlying fire. The track of a passing animal belongs to this class, and the face of one who is wrathful or sad signifies his emotion even when he does not wish to

1. Translated by D. W. Robertson Jr., who sometimes adds clarifying words or phrases in brackets.  
2. Exodus 15:25.  
3. Genesis 28:11.

4. Genesis 22:13.

5. According to St. Augustine, the "wood" is a sign of the cross. The "stone" and the "beast" represent the human nature of Christ [translator's note].

show that he is wrathful or sad, just as other emotions are signified by the expression even when we do not deliberately set out to show them. But it is not proposed here to discuss signs of this type. Since the class formed a division of my subject, I could not disregard it completely, and this notice of it will suffice.

### II

[3] Conventional signs are those which living creatures show to one another for the purpose of conveying, in so far as they are able, the motion of their spirits or something which they have sensed or understood. Nor is there any other reason for signifying, or for giving signs, except for bringing forth and transferring to another mind the action of the mind in the person who makes the sign. We propose to consider and to discuss this class of signs in so far as men are concerned with it, for even signs given by God and contained in the Holy Scriptures are of this type also, since they were presented to us by the men who wrote them. Animals also have signs which they use among themselves, by means of which they indicate their appetites. For a cock who finds food makes a sign with his voice to the hen so that she runs to him. And the dove calls his mate with a cry or is called by her in turn, and there are many similar examples which may be adduced. Whether these signs, or the expression or cry of a man in pain, express the motion of the spirit without intention of signifying or are truly shown as signs is not in question here and does not pertain to our discussion, and we remove this division of the subject from this work as superfluous.

### III

[4] Among the signs by means of which men express their meanings to one another, some pertain to the sense of sight, more to the sense of hearing, and very few to the other senses. For when we nod, we give a sign only to the sight of the person whom we wish by that sign to make a participant in our will. Some signify many things through the motions of their hands, and actors give signs to those who understand with the motions of all their members as if narrating things to their eyes. And banners and military standards visibly indicate the will of the captains. And all of these things <sup>are</sup> like so many visible words. More signs, as I have said, pertain to the ears, and most of these consist of words. But the trumpet, the flute, and the harp make sounds which are not only pleasing but also significant, although as compared with the number of verbal signs the number of signs of this kind are few. For words have come to be predominant among men for signifying whatever the mind conceives if they wish to communicate it to anyone. However, Our Lord gave a sign with the odor of the ointment with which His feet were anointed,<sup>6</sup> and the taste of the sacrament of His body and blood signified what He wished;<sup>7</sup> and when the woman was healed by touching the hem of His garment,<sup>8</sup> something was signified. Nevertheless, a multitude of innumerable signs by means of which men express their thoughts is made

6. In the gospel of St. John (12:3-8), Mary anoints Christ's feet with precious ointment. Later in *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine interprets the "good odor" of the ointment as a sign of "good fame".

(3.12.18).

7. Matthew 26:28; Luke 22:19-20.

8. Matthew 9:20-22.

up of words. And I could express the meaning of all signs of the type here touched upon in words, but I would not be able at all to make the meanings of words clear by these signs.

## IV

[5] But because vibrations in the air soon pass away and remain no longer than they sound, signs of words have been constructed by means of letters. Thus words are shown to the eyes, not in themselves but through certain signs which stand for them. These signs could not be common to all peoples because of the sin of human dissension which arises when one people seizes the leadership for itself. A sign of this pride is that tower<sup>9</sup> erected in the heavens where impious men deserved that not only their minds but also their voices should be dissonant.

## X

[15] There are two reasons why things written are not understood: they are obscured either by unknown or by ambiguous signs. For signs are either literal or figurative. They are called literal when they are used to designate those things on account of which they were instituted; thus we say *bos* [ox] when we mean an animal of a herd because all men using the Latin language call it by that name just as we do. Figurative signs occur when that thing which we designate by a literal sign is used to signify something else; thus we say "ox" and by that syllable understand the animal which is ordinarily designated by that word, but again by that animal we understand an evangelist, as is signified in the Scripture, according to the interpretation of the Apostle, when it says, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn."<sup>1</sup>

## XI

[16] Against unknown literal signs the sovereign remedy is a knowledge of languages. And Latin-speaking men, whom we have here undertaken to instruct, need two others for a knowledge of the Divine Scriptures, Hebrew and Greek,<sup>2</sup> so that they may turn back to earlier exemplars if the infinite variety of Latin translations gives rise to any doubts. Again, in these books we frequently find untranslated Hebrew words, like *amen*, *alleluia*, *racha*, *hosanna*, and so on, of which some, although they could be translated, have been preserved from antiquity on account of their holier authority, like *amen* and *alleluia*; others, like the other two mentioned above, are said not to be translatable into another language. For there are some words in some languages which cannot be translated into other languages. And this is especially true of interjections which signify the motion of the spirit rather than any part of a rational concept. And these two belong to this class: *racha* is said to be an expression of indignation and *hosanna* an expression of delight. But a knowledge of these two languages is not necessary for these few things, which are easy to know and to discover, but, as we have said, it is necessary

9. The Tower of Babel; see Genesis 11.1-9.

1. Deuteronomy 25.4. St. Paul interprets oxen as apostles, those "who labor in the word and doc-

trine," in 1 Corinthians 9.9 and 1 Timothy 5.18.

2. Augustine himself admits to having little Greek and no Hebrew.

on account of the variety of translations. We can enumerate those who have translated the Scriptures from Hebrew into Greek, but those who have translated them into Latin are innumerable. In the early times of the faith when anyone found a Greek codex, and he thought that he had some facility in both languages, he attempted to translate it.

## From Book Three

## XXIX

[40] Lettered men should know, moreover, that all those modes of expression which the grammarians designate with the Greek word *tropes* were used by our authors, and more abundantly and copiously than those who do not know them and have learned about such expressions elsewhere are able to suppose or believe. Those who know these tropes, however, will recognize them in the sacred letters, and this knowledge will be of considerable assistance in understanding them. But it is not proper to teach them to the ignorant here, lest we seem to be teaching the art of grammar. I advise that they be learned elsewhere, although I have already advised the same thing before in the second book where I discussed the necessary knowledge of languages. For letters from which grammar takes its name—the Greeks call letters *grammata*—are indeed signs of sounds made by the articulate voice with which we speak. And not only examples of all these tropes are found in reading the sacred books, but also the names of some of them, like *allegoria*, *aenigma*, *parabola*.<sup>3</sup> And yet almost all of these tropes, said to be learned in the liberal arts, find a place in the speech of those who have never heard the lectures of grammarians and are content with the usage of common speech. For who does not say, "So may you flourish"? And this is the trope called metaphor. Who does not use the word *piscina* [basin, pool, pond, tank, or other large container for water] for something which neither contains fish nor was constructed for the use of fish, when the word itself is derived from *piscis* [fish]? This trope is called catachresis.<sup>4</sup>

[41] It would be tedious to describe other examples of this kind. For the vulgar speech even extends to those tropes which are more remarkable because they imply the opposite of what is said, like that which is called irony or antiphrasis.<sup>5</sup> Now irony indicates by inflection what it wishes to be understood, as when we say to a man who is doing evil, "You are doing well." Antiphrasis, however, does not rely on inflection that it may signify the contrary, but either uses its own words whose origin is from the contrary, like *lucus*, "groove," so called *quod minime luceat*, "because it has very little light"; or it indicates that a thing is so when it wishes to imply the contrary, as when we seek to obtain what is not there and we are told, "There is plenty." Or, by adding words we may indicate that what we say is to be taken in a contrary sense, as when we say, "Beware of him, for he is a good man." And what unlearned man does not say such things without knowing at all what these tropes are or what they are called? Yet an awareness of them is nec-

3. Teaching moral lessons by means of extended metaphors. "Allegoria": saying one thing to mean another. "Aenigma": allusive or obscure speech.

4. A strained use of words.

5. From *anti*, meaning reverse, and *phrasis*, meaning diction: saying one thing and meaning the contrary.

essary to a solution of the ambiguities of the Scriptures, for when the sense is absurd if it is taken verbally, it is to be inquired whether or not what is said is expressed in this or that trope which we do not know; and in this way many hidden things are discovered.

ca. 395

### From The Trinity<sup>1</sup>

From Book Fifteen

FROM CHAPTER 9

[15] We have spoken about these things because of what the Apostle has said: 'we see now through a mirror.'<sup>2</sup> But since he added 'in an enigma,' his meaning is unknown to many who are ignorant of that branch of literature in which these modes of speech are taught; they are called tropes by the Greeks, and we ourselves also use this Greek word in place of the Latin. For just as we are more accustomed to say *schemata*<sup>3</sup> than figures, so we are more accustomed to say tropes instead of modes. But to render the names of all the modes or tropes in Latin, so as to apply to each word its appropriate name, is very difficult and quite unusual. Therefore, some of our interpreters, reluctant to use the Greek word where the Apostle says 'which are by way of allegory,'<sup>4</sup> have translated it by a circumlocution, saying 'those which signify one thing by another.' But there are very many species of this trope or allegory, and among them is that which is also called an enigma.<sup>5</sup>

But the definition of a generic term itself must include all the species. And, therefore, just as every horse is an animal, but not every animal is a horse, so every enigma is an allegory, but not every allegory is an enigma. What, then, is an allegory except a trope in which one thing is understood from another, as when he writes to the Thessalonians: 'Therefore, let us not sleep as do the rest, but let us be wakeful and sober. For they who sleep, sleep at night, and they who are drunk are drunk at night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober.'<sup>6</sup> This allegory, however, is not an enigma, for unless one is very slow of comprehension, its meaning is clear. But, to explain it briefly, an enigma is an obscure allegory, such as: 'The horseleech has three daughters,'<sup>7</sup> and whatever expressions are similar to this. But where the Apostle<sup>8</sup> speaks of the allegory, he finds it not in the words but in the deed; for he pointed out that by the two sons of Abraham, the one by a slave-girl and the other by a free woman—he was not speaking figuratively, but of something that also took place—the two Testaments are to be understood; this was obscure before he explained it, and, hence, such an allegory, which is a general name, could also be specially called an enigma.

1. Translated by Stephen McKenna.  
2. "These things," refers to Augustine's gloss, in the previous chapter, of 1 Corinthians 13.12, where the apostle Paul says: "We see now through a mirror in an enigma, but then face to face."  
3. Another technical rhetorical term for tropes.

4. Galatians 4.24. An allegory says one thing but means another.  
5. Allusive or obscure speech.  
6. 1 Thessalonians 5.6-8.  
7. Proverbs 30.15.  
8. St. Paul, Galatians 4.22-24.

### FROM CHAPTER 10

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[18] Some thoughts, then, are speeches of the heart, and that a mouth is also there<sup>9</sup> is shown by the Lord when He says: 'What goes into the mouth doth not defile a man, but what comes out of the mouth, that defiles a man.'<sup>1</sup> In one sentence he has included the two different mouths of man, the one of the body, the other of the heart. For certainly these people<sup>2</sup> thought that a man is defiled by that which enters the mouth of the body, but the Lord said a man is defiled by that which comes out of the mouth of the heart. Such was the explanation that He Himself gave of what He had said. For a little later He spoke of this subject to His disciples: 'Are you also even yet without understanding? Do you not understand that whatever enters the mouth, passes into the belly and is cast out into the drain?' Here indeed He referred very clearly to the mouth of the body. But He indicates the mouth of the heart in that which follows: 'But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and it is they that defile a man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts,' etc.<sup>3</sup> What clearer explanation can there be than this? Yet because we speak of thoughts as speeches of the heart, we do not, therefore, mean that they are not at the same time acts of sight, which arise from the sights of knowledge when they are true.

For when these take place outwardly through the body, then speech is one thing and sight another thing; but when we think inwardly, then both are one. Just as hearing and sight are two things, differing from each other in the senses of the body, but in the mind it is not one thing to see and another thing to hear; and, therefore, although speech is not seen outwardly, but is rather heard, yet the Holy Gospel says that the inner speeches, that is, the thoughts, were seen by the Lord and not heard: 'They said within themselves, "He blasphemes,"' and then it adds: 'And when Jesus had seen their thoughts.'<sup>4</sup> He saw, therefore, what they had said. For by His own thought He saw their thoughts which they alone thought that they saw.

[19] Whoever, then, can understand the word, not only before it sounds, but even before the images of its sounds are contemplated in thought—such a word belongs to no language, that is, to none of the so-called national languages, of which ours is the Latin—wherever, I say, can understand this, can already see through this mirror and in this enigma some likeness of that Word of whom it was said: 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God; and the Word was God.'<sup>5</sup>

For when we speak the truth, that is, speak of what we know, then the word which is born from the knowledge itself which we retain in the memory must be altogether of the same kind as that knowledge from which it is born. For the thought formed from that thing which we know is the word which we speak in our heart, and it is neither Greek, nor Latin, nor of any other language, but when we have to bring it to the knowledge of those to whom we are speaking, then some sign is assumed by which it may be made known. And generally this is a sound, but at times also a nod; the former is shown

9. That is, in the heart.  
1. Matthew 15.11.  
2. The scribes and pharisees (Matthew 15.1).

3. Matthew 15.10-20.  
4. Matthew 9.2-4.  
5. John 1.1.

to the ears, the latter to the eyes, in order that that word which we bear in our mind may also become known by bodily signs to the senses of the body. For even to nod, what else is it but to speak, as it were, in a visible manner? A witness for this opinion is found in the Sacred Scriptures, for we read as follows in the Gospel according to John: 'Amen, amen I say to you, one of you shall betray me. The disciples therefore looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. Now one of his disciples, he whom Jesus loved, was reclining at Jesus' bosom. Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, and said to him, "Who is it of whom he speaks?"' <sup>6</sup> Behold, he spoke by beckoning what he did not venture to speak aloud. But we make use of these and other corporeal signs of this kind when we speak to the eyes or the ears of those who are present. But letters have also been found by which we can also speak to those who are absent; but the letters are the signs of words, while the words themselves in our speech are signs of the things of which we are thinking.

#### FROM CHAPTER 11

[20] Hence, the word which sounds without is a sign of the word that shines within, to which the name of word more properly belongs. For that which is produced by the mouth of the flesh is the sound of the word, and is itself also called the word, because that inner word assumed it in order that it might appear outwardly. For just as our word in some way becomes a bodily sound by assuming that in which it may be manifested to the senses of men, so the Word of God was made flesh by assuming that in which He might also be manifested to the senses of men. And just as our word becomes a sound and is not changed into a sound, so the Word of God indeed becomes flesh, but far be it from us that it should be changed into flesh. For by assuming it, not by being consumed in it, this word of ours becomes a sound, and that Word becomes flesh.

Whoever, then, desires to arrive at some kind of a likeness to the Word of God, although unlike it in many things, let him not behold our word which sounds in the ears, either when it is brought forth in sound, or when it is thought in silence. For all words, no matter in what language they may sound, are also thought in silence; and hymns run through our mind, even when the mouth of the body is silent; not only the numbers of the syllables, but also the melodies of the hymns, since they are corporeal and belong to that sense of the body called hearing, are present by their own kind of corporeal images to those who think of them, and silently turn all of them over in their minds.

But we must pass by these things in order to arrive at that word of man, for by its likeness, of whatever sort it may be, the Word of God may in some manner be seen as in an enigma: not that which was spoken to this or that Prophet, and of which it was said: 'But the word of God increased and multiplied,' <sup>7</sup> and of which it was again said: 'Faith then by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ,' <sup>8</sup> and again: 'When you received from us the word of God, you received it not as the word of man, but, as it truly is, the word of God.' <sup>9</sup> There are numberless instances in the Scriptures where similar state-

ments are made about the word of God, which is scattered in the sounds of many different languages through the hearts and mouths of men. But it is called the word of God, therefore, because a divine and not a human doctrine is handed down. But by means of this likeness we are endeavoring to see that Word of God, in whatever way we can, of whom it was said: 'The Word was God,' of whom it was said: 'All things were made through him,' of whom it was said: 'The Word was made flesh,' <sup>1</sup> of whom it was said: 'The word of God on high is the fountain of wisdom.' <sup>2</sup>

We must, therefore, come to that word of man, to the word of a living being endowed with reason, to the word of the image of God, not born of God but made by God; this word cannot be uttered in sound nor thought in the likeness of sound, such as must be done with the word of any language; it precedes all the signs by which it is signified, and is begotten by the knowledge which remains in the mind when this same knowledge is spoken inwardly, just as it is. For the sight of thought is very similar to the sight of knowledge. For, when it is spoken through a sound or through some bodily sign, it is not spoken just as it is, but as it can be seen or heard through the body. When, therefore, that which is in the knowledge is in the word, then it is a true word, and the truth which is expected from man, so that what is in the knowledge is also in the word, and what is not in the knowledge is not in the word; it is here that we recognize 'Yes, yes; no, no.' <sup>3</sup> In this way the likeness of the image that was made approaches, insofar, as it can, to the likeness of the image that was born, whereby God the Son is proclaimed as substantially like the Father in all things.

The following likeness in this enigma to the Word of God is also to be noted: just as it was said of that Word: 'All things were made through him,' <sup>4</sup> where it is declared that God made all things through His only-begotten Word, so there are no works of man which are not first spoken in the heart, and, therefore, it is written: 'The beginning of every work is the word.' <sup>5</sup> But even here when the word is true, then it is the beginning of a good work. But the word is true, if it is begotten from the knowledge of working well, so that here too the admonition may be preserved: 'Yes, yes; no, no.' If it is 'yes' in the knowledge by which one must live, it is also 'yes' in the word by which the work is to be fulfilled; if it is 'no' there, it is also 'no' here. Otherwise, such a word will be a lie, not the truth, and consequently a sin and not a right work.

In the likeness of our word, there is also this likeness of the Word of God, that our word can exist and yet no work may follow it; but there can be no work unless the word precedes, just as the Word of God could be, even though no creature existed, but no creature could be, except through that Word through whom all things were made. Therefore, not God the Father, not the Holy Spirit, not the Trinity itself, but the Son alone, who is the Word of God, was made flesh, although the Trinity brought this about, in order that by our word following and imitating His example, we might live rightly, that is, that we might have no lie either in the contemplation or in the work of our word. But this perfection of this image is to be at some time in the

1. John 1.1, 3, 14.  
2. Ecclesiasticus 1.5.  
3. Matthew 5.37: "But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil."  
4. John 1.1.  
5. Ecclesiasticus 37.20.

6. Romans 10.17.  
9. 1 Thessalonians 2.13.

6. John 13.21-24.  
7. Acts 6.7.

future. In order to obtain it, the good master instructs us by the Christian faith and the doctrine of godliness, that 'with face unveiled,' from the veil of the Law, which is the shadow of things to come, 'beholding the glory of the Lord,' that is, looking as it were through a mirror, 'we might be transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as through the Spirit of the Lord,' according to our previous explanation of these words.

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416

6. 2 Corinthians 3.18.

## MACROBIUS

b. ca. 360

Throughout the Middle Ages and up until at least the end of the seventeenth century, Macrobius's *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* was the authoritative text on the meaning of dreams, influencing poets and critics from DANTE and Chaucer down to Milton. In addition this account of dreams in general, and Scipio's dream in particular, engages with questions about the role of fables in philosophy and the figurative nature of the truth that have interested philosophers as diverse as FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE, Richard Rorty, and JACQUES DERRIDA. When Macrobius wrote that "Philosophy does not discountenance all stories nor does it accept all," he defined for subsequent ages the Neoplatonic attitude toward literature. Some fables proclaim their falsity and deserve at best to be relegated to "children's nurseries." But others, those which present "a decent and dignified conception of holy truths . . . presented beneath a modest veil of allegory," are not only appropriate but necessary to philosophy. In this way Macrobius's commentary defends Cicero's inclusion of the "Dream of Scipio" in a serious philosophical treatise on good government.

In the oldest manuscripts the author of *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* is called "Macrobius Ambrosius Theodosius, vir clarissimus et inlustris" (most famous and illustrious man), a title that, in the Roman world of late antiquity, was used only of someone holding the highest public office. Almost nothing else is known of his life except that he was not a native of Italy; he may have been from Africa; he had a son, Eustachius, to whom he dedicated his major works; and he flourished at the end of the fourth and beginning of the fifth century. Scholars have attempted, unsuccessfully, to identify him with various government functionaries also named Macrobius who are mentioned in legal texts of the period. Although he was a contemporary of St. AUGUSTINE, it is not clear whether Macrobius was a Christian. He never mentions Christianity and reveals in his writing a fondness for pagan antiquities. However, to hold high governmental positions in the fifth-century Roman world, he would have had to be at least a nominal Christian, and nothing in the texts attributed to him would contradict the beliefs of fifth-century Christianity.

Macrobius is the author of two works that have been wholly or partially preserved, the *Saturnalia* (ca. 395) and *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* (ca. 400). A third treatise, *On the Differences and Similarities of the Greek and Latin Verb*, has been lost, though summaries of it survive in the later Middle Ages. Books 3 and 4 of *Saturnalia* are devoted to commentary on Virgil's works; they illustrate the tendency

in the fourth-century Roman world to regard Virgil less as a great poet than as a philosopher, an authority of prodigious wisdom and learning, a role he plays in the *Commentary* as well.

At the conclusion of his *Republic*, the Roman statesman and philosopher Cicero (106–43 B.C.E.) recounts a dream of Scipio Africanus the Younger (Roman general and statesman, ca. 184–129 B.C.E.), in which he meets his famous grandfather, Scipio Africanus the Elder (ca. 235–183 B.C.E.), the general who defeated Hannibal during the Second Punic War. In the course of the dream, Scipio the Elder shows his grandson a vision of the "celestial circles, orbits, and spheres, the movements of the planets, and the revolutions of the heavens." The *Republic*, a treatise on good government modeled on PLATO's *Republic*, was not known in the Middle Ages except for this brief fragment, which was preserved only because Macrobius wondered why Cicero would choose to include such a "fiction and dream" in a serious philosophical treatise. Macrobius defends the obviously fabulous "Dream of Scipio" from detractors who argued that "philosophers should refrain from using fiction since no kind of fiction has a place with those who profess to tell the truth."

Macrobius's *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* is a fascinating example of an early commentary on a nonbiblical text; it greatly influenced the development of this medieval genre, an expository tradition that grew out of the late classical encyclopedic glosses of pagan texts. Commentaries were central to the medieval experience of reading any authoritative (that is, Latin) text, an integral part of the process of transmitting canonical works. Macrobius's commentary uses Scipio's dream as an occasion for an exposition of Neoplatonic doctrine and its relation to such subjects as arithmetic, astronomy, the music of the spheres, geography, and the immortality of the soul. Macrobius's philosophical Neoplatonism, however, his belief that reality must be located in a transcendental spiritual realm that gives meaning to the visible world, is of interest to literary critics primarily because it contends that the higher truths philosophy strives to discover can be accessed only through figurative language and allegorical veils.

"The Dream of Scipio" offers a wide-ranging account of dreams and their relationship to the fables required to make sense of transcendent truths such as the nature of the soul or God. Macrobius catalogues the various types of dreams, particularly the five varieties of "enigmatic dreams," demonstrating a systematic approach to dream interpretation that would dominate the understanding of dreams for centuries. Throughout the Middle Ages, this chapter on dreams was the most popular section of the *Commentary*. While its details differ from the later psychoanalytic approach to dreams, Macrobius's account shares with SIGMUND FREUD's analysis a belief that dreams function like narratives and can be used to uncover truths not visible to empirical observation.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

The standard Latin edition of Macrobius's works, *Macrobius*, was edited by Francis Eyssenhardt in 1893 and updated by J. Willis in 1963. *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* was translated into English by William Harris Stahl in 1952. In 1969 Percival Vaughan Davies published an English translation of Macrobius's only other surviving work, *The Saturnalia*. Few studies focus on Macrobius as a figure in his own time. These include Thomas Whittaker in *Macrobius; or, Philosophy, Science, and Letters in the Year 400* (1923) and Herman de Ley in *Macrobius and Numa: A Study of Macrobius, In Somnium Scipionis* 1.c.12 (1972). T. R. Glover includes a chapter on Macrobius in *Life and Letters in the Fourth Century* (1968), as does Jane Chance in *Medieval Mythography: From Roman North Africa to the School of Chartres, A.D. 433–1177* (1994). Most literary studies track the influence of Macrobius's analysis of dreams on later medieval literature and criticism; among the best examples are Allison M. Peden's "Macrobius and Medieval Dream Literature" (1985) and Constance B.