

Visions of the Future: Dream narratology in (Proto-)Science Fiction

by
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Abstract

Dream narration has a lengthy history in the Western literary tradition, functioning as the earliest iteration of the frame story. Dream narratives can be found in the Bible, and in Greek and Latin classical literature, but perhaps reached a zenith during the Medieval period, when dream visions became a central narratological strategy in theological texts and secular romances alike. Deriving from this Medieval tradition, early speculative literature utilises the dream narrative to construct and legitimise literary speculations about the future. Futurological dream narratives are thus mediated and undermined by the distancing mechanism of dreaming. Yet paradoxically, they are also legitimated by Christian traditions of belief in predictive dreaming and divine visitation through dreams which were not deconstructed until firstly the Age of Enlightenment and more fully following the advent of Freudian psychoanalysis. In a further subversion, these traditions were often challenged and questioned by early Science Fiction, even as it adopted the legitimating form of Christian dream visions.

My paper intends to examine how early SF exemplified this usage of dream narration for centuries after the Medieval dream poem tradition had waned. I hope to demonstrate that the mechanism of dream narrative within science fiction was not eradicated by the advent of seventeenth century 'Protestant' rationalism, as has been argued by SF historian and scholar Adam Roberts, but instead has persisted in a tradition that encompasses the work of H.G. Wells, Olaf Stapledon and other modern authors.

Keywords

Science fiction, dreams in literature, narratology, Medieval poetry.

Science Fiction (hereafter SF) has long been considered the literary genre which tacks closest to rationality. Despite its clear roots in fantastical literature, notably the Gothic and the earlier Scientific Romance, attempts to define SF or to establish an originating point for the genre have habitually sought to relate its emergence to the science from which its name derives. While the birthdate of SF remains hotly contested, with many critics, such as Brian Aldiss, espousing Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as the point of origin; others Voltaire or Edgar Allan Poe; and some dating it as far back as the Greeks or even the Gilgamesh epic; a consensus has arisen that SF's origins relate primarily to its close connection with rationalism and the emergence of science. Those critics for whom SF as a literary genre of ideas replicates the scientific method of speculative exploration and analysis, have latterly followed SF historian Adam Roberts in pinpointing the liminal border between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment as the moment when Protestant 'rational' SF sundered from Catholic 'magical' fantasy.

This is problematic for two reasons. Primarily, it enforces an originating moment rather than an ur-text, and Roberts proposes the death of the proto-rationalist Giordano Bruno at the hands of the Inquisition in 1600¹ as the moment when Catholic hegemony rejected the developments of early natural science by opposing the Copernican view of the Cosmos and thereby condemned Catholicism to a retrograde future in which scientific development would be viewed as a threat to be countered or suppressed. However, as the Brunonian scholar Frances Yates has extensively demonstrated², Bruno's own philosophy drew heavily upon the mystical tradition of the magical Hermetic tradition. While his derived conclusion from Copernicus - that there may be a myriad of planets with uncountable proliferation of intelligent life - is undoubtedly science fictional, Bruno's conclusion was informed more by arcane and esoteric traditions of magic than by a proto-rationality which could be considered in any way scientific.

Additionally, Roberts's introduction of a religious component to SF's origins generate an uneasy dichotomy which allies Protestantism with rationality against Catholicism and 'magical' thinking.³ This unnecessarily sectarian approach to uncovering SF's origins ignores the less rational elements in many forms of Protestantism no less than it evades the contributions made

1 Adam Roberts, *The History of Science Fiction*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 36.

2 Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, (London: Routledge, 2002).

3 Roberts, *History*, 3.

by Catholicism to the history of rational thought and science in particular. The aim of this paper is to blur that demarcation line. Furthermore, since this limiting definition cuts SF off from many of its founding impetuses, I intend to correct that by proposing a significant influence of Catholic medieval dream poetry, and its antecedents in the Bible and Latin literature, upon the earliest SF and upon a tradition of visionary SF which continued into the twentieth century.

Whatever date one chooses for the birth of SF, it is clear that the motif of exploring future existence is a key component of the genre. If we extend the conceit of science to SF, then it becomes a form of literary thought experiment, in which authors explore the consequences of various possible futures. The SF critic Darko Suvin borrowed from Bertolt Brecht the concept of the novum, which in SF terms denotes the singularity which affects the change from our present reality to the created reality of the SF universe, thereby permitting the literary experiment to take place. Common nova in SF include interplanetary travel, robots, alien interactions and time travel.

To travel in time to the past in a literary sense is not really to travel in an SF sense, however. Since Walter Scott, we have defined the genre of the historical novel which trades in reconstructed literary depictions of previous eras. It is the novum of travel forward into the future that marks achronological texts as potential SF. Nova do exist within historical fiction, primarily in the form of Jonbar points, hinges in time where the author diverts from recorded history. Such speculative alt-histories are generally considered science fictional, in that they adhere to the conceit of SF as literary experiment. An examination of such texts, including Kingsley Amis's *The Alteration* or Keith Roberts's *Pavane*, appear to endorse Adam Roberts's understanding of Catholicism as a retrograde, anti-scientific social force. By seeking to rewrite history by erasing the Reformation, they unwrite the Enlightenment and plunge the world into a regressive, unscientific age, dominated by the Vatican. Yet it is circular logic to suggest that SF originates from the Enlightenment simply because some SF texts function as anti-Catholic literature. By considering the more common form of achronological SF, which trades in depictions of or travel to the future, one seminal element of SF can be uncovered in the mystical dream literature of the Catholic Middle Ages.

Visions of the future predate SF no matter how early a date one chooses for the

genre's creation. The practice of oneiromancy, or dream interpretation, as well as examples of prophetic dreaming can be found in the Bible and the literature of the ancient Middle East, and these latter have proved indirectly influential over the development of futurological speculation in SF and how it has been narratologically constructed. According to Biblical scholar Robert Gnuse, "In the ancient Near East, dreams were seen as a mode of revelation by which the gods spoke to kings and priests, and for common folk dreams symbolically foretold the future when properly interpreted with the aid of dream books or professional interpreters."⁴ Gnuse describes three forms of ancient dream: auditory message dreams which contain direct verbal messages from a deity; symbolic message dreams from deities which require interpretation; and 'psychological status dreams' which also require interpretation (this latter was the day-to-day oneiromancy, where commoners would consult dream interpreters about the meaning of their dreams). The former two forms of dream tended to be experienced by important people. The Greeks added a variant of the auditory message dream – the Speaking Dream Image, in which the deity appears in a dream and speaks their message.

As well as the dreams of Joseph and the Egyptians in Genesis, Nebuchadnezzar's dreams in the Book of Daniel, and dreams by Jacob, Solomon and others, Jean-Marie Husser identifies a broader dream tradition in the region and era of the Bible, within the literatures of Mesopotamia, the Hatti, Ancient Egypt and Syro-Phoenicia, leading into the Western tradition via dream narratives contained in early Homeric literature.⁵ Husser notes that dreams in these traditions perform two narratological purposes – either they prophecy forthcoming action or else they form a diptych which hinges on the moment of awakening, after which the dreamer attempts to emulate or copy the events of the dream. Such narratological strategies are distinct from what we may think of as more typical Biblical-era dream scenarios which are often constructed to permit communication from or discourse with divinities. The most influential of all Biblical dreams is obviously the *Revelation of Saint John*, which contained a prophetic symbolic vision of the end of the world that shaped Christian and Western thinking about the future of mankind for centuries and has been no small influence upon the lengthy tradition of millennialist and post-apocalyptic literature, much of which is SF in part or

⁴ Robert Gnuse, "Dreams in the Bible", *The Bible Today*, Vol. 49, no. 4, July 2011, 215.

⁵ Jean-Marie Husser, *Dream and Dream Narratives in the Biblical World*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press,, 1999), 103.

in whole.

Latin literature, drawing from the Homeric style, developed a literary tradition of dreams also. These must be distinguished, just as they must be in the Hellenic context, from acts of oneiromancy, wherein priestly figures, such as the sibyls or the oracles, sought to prophecy the future by interpreting dreams. An interesting development of the dream narrative in the Latin era is its sundering from prophecy and oneiromancy or any discussion of deities. One of the most influential Latin dream texts was the *Somnium Scipionis*, which not only influenced medieval dream poetry by way of Macrobius's fifth century commentary, but in its detailed depiction of cosmology as it was then understood, can be seen as a precursor to Kepler's *Somnium*, or even later SF such as Olaf Stapledon's *Star Maker*. Scipio's development of this narrative form was primarily cosmological, since the removal of the body from earthly confines facilitated a narratological perspective which permitted consideration of Earth's place in the (then Ptolemaic) universe.

Scipio dreams of his adoptive grandfather, the Punic War hero, who takes him out of his body and above the Earth, where he has a vision of the spheres of the cosmos and the geography of the Earth. In this sense, Scipio's *Somnium* functions as a repository for contemporary cosmological science. When Macrobius came to gloss this text,⁶ he categorised dreams into five types, a construction which remained current into the early modern era. The *insomnium* was a nightmare, perhaps inspired by evil spirits. The *phantasma* was a vision of chaos. The *oraculum* was, drawing on the Biblical and classical precedents, a direct communication from the divine. The *somnium* itself was an enigmatic dream, often requiring its symbols to be interpreted to be understood. The final category is the *visio*, which is a straightforward prophecy of the future. Macrobius's anatomical understanding of dreaming helped shape the narratological structure of texts like Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, which in turn was to influence the development of the medieval dream poem. As A.C. Spearing notes, "medieval writers of dream-poems were conscious of writing in an ancient tradition, going back to Scriptural and Classical sources, to which they felt a need to establish the relationship of their own poetic visions."⁷

⁶ Ambrosius Aurelius Theodosius Macrobius, *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*, intr. and trans. William Harris Stahl, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.)

⁷ A.C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 4.

In the second half of the fourteenth century, dreaming frameworks became a central narratological strategy in French and English theological texts and secular romances alike. There is no single or obvious reason for why this development occurred, and critics have speculated about the disorientating effects of dreams coinciding with particular historical difficulties of the era extensively, but to no clear conclusion. Nevertheless, one can see from the opening of Dante's *Inferno*, to the French *chansons* and *dits*, to the poetry of Chaucer, Langland, Gower and the *Pearl* poet, evidence of this clear trend toward framing narratives within dreams. Spearing rightly identifies the *Roman de la Rose* as the most influential of medieval dream poems, and its frame narrative, which commences with an invocation of Macrobius endorsing the 'truth' inherent in dreaming, is one that is emulated by most of the later poets.

These dream poems had such a coherent set of conventions that critics like George Kane have identified them as a separate literary genre⁸ (Kane 1965, 11). Often the dreamer is located in a wooded glade in springtime, or is suffering insomnia in bed. They cross the liminal border into dream, and may encounter a spiritual guide, such as Dante's Virgil or the *Pearl* poet's daughter, who escorts them through their vision. They may witness Hell or Heaven or both. When they return and awaken, they are changed spiritually by the experience and drawn to interpret it and record it. These conventions overlap with many of the attributes of the phenomenon of near-death experience, and Susan Gunn has examined the parallels between *Pearl* and modern Near-death Experience (NDE)⁹. However, these conventions have not only informed science but also helped to shape the development of SF narrative. This is especially apparent in the visions of other worlds depicted within medieval dream poems. Within the dream-state, it is not possible to assert that a vision of Hell or Heaven takes place in the 'present' of the dreamer. In fact, such visions take place in a demonstrably different timeframe. The daughter-guide in *Pearl* is depicted as a grown woman, yet when she died, she was a two year-old child. Such visions of the afterlife in Medieval dream poetry, in other words, can be read also as visions of possible futures.

In his *History of Science Fiction*, Adam Roberts pinpoints the birth of the genre as the moment that Giordano Bruno was put to death for heresy in

⁸ George Kane, *The Autobiographical Fallacy in Chaucer and Langland Studies*, (London: Chambers Memorial Lecture, 1965), 11.

⁹ Susan Gunn, "Pearl: Medieval Dream Vision and Modern Near-Death Experience," *Journal of Religion and Psychological Research*, (July 1995, Vol. 18, Issue 3), 132-140.

1600 by the Roman Inquisition for promoting the Copernican model of the universe and proposing an infinite number of worlds inhabited by sapient beings. Bruno's theorising of other worlds is fundamental to Roberts's notion of what SF is about. In terms of literature, Roberts follows Carl Sagan and Isaac Asimov in anointing Johannes Kepler's *Somnium* as the first SF text, though this in itself is problematic since Kepler's text was scientific research masquerading as adventure fiction so as to evade the censorious attentions of Church authorities. Roberts identifies Kepler's *Somnium* as a "mobile Protestant *voyage extraordinaire*" in contrast to "static, Catholic" utopias, which originated a century earlier with Sir Thomas More.¹⁰

Leaving aside the debate as to whether utopia is inherently static – contemporary critics of utopia such as Ernst Bloch, Fredric Jameson and Tom Moylan would suggest otherwise – evidently Kepler's text owes much in terms of narratological structure to the Catholic medieval dream poem which in turn derived that structure from Macrobian *somnium*. The structure of a dream encompassing an extraterrestrial vision, rooted in scientific observation, extends back, via Chaucer's *House of Fame*, to Macrobius and Scipio. An additional complication arises out of Roberts's binary opposition between utopia and *voyage extraordinaire*. In many proto-SF texts, such as Gabriel de Foigny's *La Terre Australe Connue* (1676), an extraordinary voyage concludes with a description of a utopia (or dystopia). The defining narratological change in the early modern era is not the emergence of rational science or the scientific method so much as the dawn of the imperial age, which generated sufficient reports and travellers' tales of new lands to inspire the new literary genre of the *voyage extraordinaire*.

Kepler's text does avoid utopia, insofar that his purpose is more to describe the moon scientifically rather than to fictionalise a utopian society, and in the sense that it involves an extraterrestrial journey, *Somnium* could feasibly be considered a *voyage extraordinaire* with SF sensibilities. Narratologically, the text features two dreams one nested inside the other, both drawing on the medieval poetic tradition. The opening frame is that of Kepler himself dreaming. Within his *somnium*, his hero Duracotus is also put to sleep with opiates in order to survive the transit to Levania, or the moon. These two crossings of the dream threshold perform very different functions. Duracotus is sedated so as to survive the perils of sudden acceleration and breathing in a

¹⁰ Roberts, *History*, 54.

limited atmosphere. While Kepler could not entirely comprehend the nature of interplanetary travel, nevertheless his description of some elements, such as the force of gravity, inertia and the nature of atmosphere, are as radically prescient of later science as the early adoption of Copernican cosmology that underpins the text and was his reason for writing it.

The reason the entirety of the text is framed as a dream was much more pragmatic. Kepler had originally attempted to present the science of *Somnium* as a dissertation in 1593, but its radical anti-Ptolemaic cosmology was rejected by the academic authorities and led him and his family into trouble with the Church. Kepler was careful to tread a fine line as a court astronomer, publishing much innovative science, but always leavening his Copernican bias with sufficient Ptolemaism to satisfy the religious authorities. The frame-narrative of dreaming that bookends the *Somnium* therefore functions as a distancing mechanism, permitting Kepler to disown the speculative science contained in its extensive footnotes. This strategy of masking literary or scientific inquiry which might prove unpopular by framing it as a dream persisted in SF into the Victorian era.

Due to the influence of the imperial age, and rapid colonial expansion into previously unknown territories, the sudden explosion of what we might term travelogue literature in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had an enormous influence on speculative fiction. *Voyages extraordinaires* texts and utopias set in remote unexplored parts of the planet or else in hollow earth scenarios predominated in this era. These often served the purpose of oblique political commentary or satire, as in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. In many cases, they were used to explore issues of religious or doctrinal concern. There is a small tradition of lunar visitation texts which, as the Enlightenment gathered pace, explored the ramifications of Giordano Bruno's speculation about sapient life on other worlds. However, as with many of the *voyages extraordinaires*, these lunar texts often focused on issues of speculative theology, asking questions such as whether the men on the moon were subject to Original Sin, or whether Christ's salvatory sacrifice extended beyond the confines of this planet. This area of speculation, now known as exotheology, remains current today both within SF and in theological exploration, and has even been the subject of conferences at the Vatican.

What Roberts refers to as a "mystical-religious trope of souls touring the

material solar system”¹¹ can be discerned in the science poetry of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These were not dreams or visions at all, but very much an attempt to depict in poetry the cosmological discoveries of the Enlightenment. Roberts describes this genre as “an almost entirely ‘Protestant’ and English phenomenon”, but it ran parallel to a dream-vision tradition that burgeoned in other European literature, particularly French prose, that is more recognisable as what we would now think of as SF. In Louis Sebastian Mercier’s 1771 novel *L’An deux mille quatre cent quarante*, for example, the narrator has a heated discussion with an Englishman about the flaws of contemporary France before retiring to bed. When he awakes, it is in the 25th century where oppression, slavery and abuse have been eradicated, and the monarchy and the Church abolished. This rational, republican future France is clearly a Utopian vision, made all the more evident by the narrator encountering fellow time-traveller Louis XIV in the ruins of Versailles, where the old king expresses his guilt. The narrator is bitten by a snake, however, and is woken by the shock back in his own time. Mercier had a tempestuous relationship with the authorities made no easier by the publication and enormous success of *L’An deux mille quatre cent quarante*, which went through 20 editions in three languages in twelve years. Nevertheless, his work is now considered an early example of the potentially prophetic power of SF, since many of the changes detailed in his future vision came to pass only a few years later during the French Revolution.

Mercier’s optimistic text can be usefully contrasted with Jean-Baptiste de Grainville’s prose poem *Le Dernier Homme*, which was published after the terror and restoration of imperial power in 1805. De Grainville’s text is commonly proposed as the earliest expression of ‘dying-world’ SF, since it depicts the end of the world, and is thought to have influenced Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*. However, as with much proto-SF, *Le Dernier Homme* conflates religious and rational themes and sentiments in a manner that is as much reminiscent of medieval dream poetry as it is of contemporary futurist SF. On the one hand, de Grainville depicts a Malthusian dystopia in the far future and a cataclysmic explosion of human sterility, both common tropes of modern apocalyptic SF. On the other, it contains a very medieval vision of Hell, as well as angel visitation and an encounter with Adam, the first man. Narratologically, the story is framed as a tale told to the narrator by a spirit. But it contains within, as some of Chaucer’s and Gower’s dream poetry does,

¹¹ Roberts, *History*, 67.

a further dream, in which the protagonist Omegarus has a vision of the last fertile woman on Earth, whom he then goes to visit.

In Victorian proto-SF, the influence of industrialisation helped to generate SF's ongoing attachment to technology as a source of its nova, but it also triggered a vast upsurge in depictions of utopia, often pastoral and anti-industrial in form, in response to the 'dark, Satanic mills'. Donald E. Morse writes of "the utopian visions of the nineteenth century that eventually numbered more than sixteen hundred"¹². In addition, endless pulp novels and short stories featured visions of the future that are not related to matters of utopia, but rather like Mercier's novel, focus on visions of the future as political commentary on the present, or else, like Kepler's *Somnium*, locate radical discussions of scientific development within a dream (and often in the far future too). Among the most prominent of these is Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward 2000-1887*, which did not merely spawn imitative sequels to its hypnotic dream account of life in the 21st century, but also led to the foundation of hundreds of 'Bellamy Clubs' where the public discussed ways to implement his ideas of utopian socialism. In cases such as Bellamy's text, the purpose of dream-framing is clearly to iterate the utopian aspect of the future vision, an attainable heaven no less inspirational than the medieval dreams of paradise. Equally, as with Kepler, the purpose of dream-framing in many other Victorian SF texts was very much to facilitate contradicting the import of the text, in order to avoid public condemnation from political or religious authorities. Everett Bleiler has highlighted this issue of apparently self-contradicting SF. According to Bleiler:

A typical example is the story that is presented as fantastic until the ending, when the author apologetically removes the sub-structure by declaring the story a dream or the product of madness. Thus, the voyage to Mars turns out to be the claim of a lunatic, or the world catastrophe is only a dream or drug delirium.

Such stories, however, do not represent a different point of view or internal dynamic from full science-fiction. They may even be highly technical. They merely mirror the cultural censorship of the day: An editor might hesitate to publish an undiverted story of life in the future, for fear of complaints; he could soften matters by insisting that the author negate what went on before.¹³

¹² Donald E. Morse, "Introduction", in *Anatomy of Science Fiction*, ed. Donald E. Morse, (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), 2.

¹³ Everett Franklin Bleiler, *Science-Fiction, The Early Years*, (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press,

As noted in relation to Kepler, this dream-frame strategy of deniability is nothing new. In fact, it dates back to the medieval dream poem, in particular Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, which itself borrowed the strategy from Latin historical writing, according to W.A. Davenport: "Dream is a useful device of disguise for the political commentator and satirist, and the kind of allegorical vision which Gower elaborately compiles here [in *Confessio Amantis*] has a long ancestry in Latin historical writing."¹⁴ The requirement to enclose potentially contentious speculative fiction in a respectable wrapper of oneiric deniability has waned in direct proportion to the power of religious authorities, but it is interesting to note that, for very different reasons, dream narratives were utilised in the SF of H.G. Wells, Olaf Stapledon, C.S. Lewis and David Lindsay into the twentieth century.

In the work of H.G. Wells, especially in *The Dream*, and arguably in *Men like Gods* and *A Modern Utopia* also, where the protagonists are transported to extraterrestrial or parallel universe utopias instantaneously, there is no attempt to explain the transportation rationally. Whether dream-framed or not, (and again the precedent of medieval dream-poetry remains evident, since in fourteenth century literature also, a text may often be a dream without an overt statement of crossing the limen into unconsciousness), Wells's texts indicate a focus on an alternate reality that contains the possibility of being our own future, deriving from his obsession with utopian issues later in life. A similar conflation of religious and scientific perspective can be found in these Wellsian utopias as existed in earlier proto-SF; in *Men Like Gods*, the protagonist is transported to another world 3,000 years ahead of ours, literally called Utopia, which functions as an anarchy, but which also had a Christ who died on the wheel, thereby resolving the age-old exotheological problem of alien salvation.

David Lindsay's 1920 novel *Voyage to Arcturus* is sometimes classified as fantastical rather than SF, but it does contain an interstellar voyage to an alien planet, in which the protagonist Maskull is drugged, just like Kepler's hero, in order to survive the journey. When he awakens on the planet Tormance, he finds he has grown additional sense organs and can identify two new primary colours, a literally indescribable paradigm shift in reality perspective, akin to medieval dream-poetry attempts to describe Heaven or Hell, that suggests an

1990), viii.

14 W. A. Davenport, "Dreams in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*", *English Studies* Vol. 91, No. 4, June 2010, pp. 377-378.

oneiric rather than realist narratology. Lindsay's text generates a Manichean binary of good and evil out of Tormance's terrestrial visitors and, considered as allegory, it may be compared to Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Lindsay's complex adventure story continues a long lineage of marrying religious and supernatural themes to scientific interest which dates back to the earliest proto-SF.

Inspired by Lindsay's novel, C.S. Lewis's *Out of the Silent Planet*, which was in part an attempt to reintroduce religious considerations into a genre Lewis felt had been atheised by Wells, also utilises the drug-dream route to the stars. His hero Ransom is kidnapped and drugged, awakening on a spherical craft bound for Malacandra, or Mars. Ransom's nemesis, Dr Weston, is an empirical (and imperial) physicist, and the author's note in which Lewis refers to both Wells and "[c]ertain slighting references to earlier stories of this type" make it very clear who Weston is intended to represent. Ransom's name indicates his ultimate role in Lewis's SF trilogy – encountering a Satanic figure on Venus, he is destined to fulfill a Christlike sacrificial role in order to prevent a second Fall.

It is notable that from the time of Lindsay onwards, SF has not overtly used the dream-frame format without a concomitant appeal to drugging, or as a metaphor for some other form of altered reality. This may be attributable to the emergence of psychoanalysis in the early twentieth century, and its attempt to empirically examine the nature of dreaming, especially in the works of Freud and Jung. Both Freudian or Jungian approaches to dream analysis concur that dreams contain narrativisation even as they are being experienced, due to the mind's attempt to process the image stream of the latent dream. Hence three layers of narrative exist – the latent dream stream, the secondary revision of the manifest dream, which is how the dream is experienced by the mind, and the recollected dream report, which is mediated by conscious recollection, confabulation and organisation. Given these strata of narration in actual dreaming, it goes beyond mere metaphor to suggest that dream-framed literary narratives of the future could be interpretable as lucid dreaming, conscious attempts to replicate the imaginative and wish-fulfilment aspects of actual dreaming.

Perhaps the epitome of later SF's debt to medieval dream-poetry is Olaf Stapledon's *Star Maker*, a classic 1937 text in which the narrator lies down

on a heath and is suddenly transported from the planet and escorted about the universe, not unlike Scipio, and ends with an encounter with the Star Maker himself, a clearly divine figure, before he awakens with “[a] surge of joy, wild joy ... Then peace.”¹⁵ There is no need to labour the parallels between formats. The lying in the open air while emotionally upset, being transported across a sense boundary, experiencing an extraterrestrial view of Earth, being escorted about the known universe, encountering that universe’s maker, then awakening full of joy and peace is a format found identically in *Pearl* written over five centuries before *Star Maker*.

But quasi-religious themes in SF took alternative directions after Stapledon, and he proved to be one of the last SF writers to seek to evoke an earlier model of dreaming than the psychoanalytic one. Today, dream visions in SF are almost entirely pure metaphor, indicative not of dreaming itself but a mode of analogous expression for virtual realities that are best explained by metaphorical means. William Gibson’s cyberpunk vision of a virtual future in the *Neuromancer* trilogy pursues this strategy successfully, commencing with a bi-directional metaphor in which his hero Case both considers cyberspace as a hallucinatory dream-state and actively dreams of cyberspace while sleeping, envisaging escaping “the prison of the flesh”¹⁶. By the third volume of the trilogy, *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, the Count is permanently hooked to the Matrix, where he lives in a dreamland paradise depicted as a contemporary Eden.

In earlier literary eras, right up until the psychoanalytical models of dreaming began to emerge, dream narratives functioned in a similar way to SF nova, generating estranging paradigm shifts which facilitated consideration and analysis of existence beyond that which could be discerned from an entirely earthbound perspective. This narratological tradition, in the Medieval era, was suffused with Catholic theology and often functioned as devotional literature, yet this Catholic thematic element need not disqualify the tradition from consideration as a formative element in the construction of what was to become SF. The dominant perspective of SF as a fundamentally rational literature of ideas arising out of the Enlightenment ignores such earlier informing traditions and thereby limits understanding, in an unnecessarily sectarian manner, of how SF constructed itself.

¹⁵ Olaf Stapledon, *Star Maker*, (London: Gollancz, 1999), 209.

¹⁶ William Gibson, *Neuromancer*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000), 11.

SF has not lost its impetus to see and depict the future, but it no longer requires the construction of a dream-framework to envision or equivocate about the speculative futures it portrays. Following Wells, nova such as time travel have served in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries the narratological purpose of shifting paradigms into the future which dreaming fulfilled in proto-SF. However, while the lengthy debt this most rational of literary genres owes to the very mystical and religious dream-visions of medieval poetry may have finally been expunged, it has not yet been sufficiently acknowledged by SF criticism.

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