

Macrobius

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 08 May 2000

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Nigel Price — 08 May 2000, 19:36

Alga wrote...

I dug out Chaucer. "The Parliament of Fowls" is a charming Valentine's Day poem. The poet has been reading Scipio Africanus...

<Click!! >

(What was that? Oh no, it was the sound of Nigel switching into Mindless Pedantry Mode...)

Nothing to do with Crowley, and even less to do with Wolfe, but when Chaucer writes in "The Parlement of Foules" that he has been reading "Tullyus of the Drem of Scipioun", he almost certainly means that he's been reading Macrobius' commentary on Cicero's "Somnium Scipionis" ("the Dream of Scipio"). "Tullyus" refers to Cicero's full name: Marcus Tullius Cicero. The "Somnium Scipionis" originally formed part of book VI of Cicero's "De Re Publica", but was always accompanied in mediaeval times by Macrobius' lengthy commentary (c 400 A.D.). I've read Macrobius, and he's terminally dull, but the commentary was enormously influential in mediaeval thought, at a time when the interpretation of dreams was a popular obsession. Chaucer quotes or refers to Macrobius in several works, including "The Book of the Duchess" and "The House of Fame", and in "The Nun's Priest's Tale", where he sends up the whole debate about the interpretation of dreams, and brings in Boethius as well so that he can have a go at the scholarly predestination debate while he's at it.

Not sure I'd completely agree with the notion that the narrative tour of heaven and hell had completely died out by the mid-14th century... Depends quite what you mean. It long persisted as a literary trope in various forms, particularly in the various mutations of Renaissance epic, up to and including Milton, of course, in the 17th century.

But maybe you meant something more specific.

<Click!!>

(Phew! He's switched off. I think we're safe again now!)

Nigel