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THE HIGH MEDIEVAL DREAM VISION: POETRY, PHILOSOPHY, AND LITERARY FORM. By Kathryn L. Lynch. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988. ISBN 0-8047-1275-1. Pp. xiv + 263. \$35.00.

Reviewed by Anne Eggebrotten, Whittier College

Kathryn Lynch has chosen to study poems which "assert, in the face of worldly ambiguity and diversity, that art, life, and God's truth can be reconciled" (p. 76). Preeminent among these poems is Dante's *Commedia*, but her concern is not individual poems. She defines and traces an entire genre, hitherto neglected, the philosophical dream vision.

The topic of medieval dream visions first brings to mind Chaucer's love visions, *Piers Plowman*, the *Pearl*, and Christine de Pisan's works. These visions, however, occur in the late fourteenth century, after the earlier synthesis between faith and reason, revealed truth and earthly truth, had begun to break down. Lynch focuses on the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (the "high Middle Ages"), when the medieval world was discovering and assimilating Aristotelian natural science. Epistemological change was occurring, but everyone believed that reason's inductions would be consistent with truth as revealed in the Bible.

Lynch proposes that the philosophical vision became an important genre in this period because it could explore the difficult relation between divine and earthly truth—"and thus could become as well a means for protecting the world view that relied on the unity between the two" (p. 26). That aspect of the vision which attracted poets was its liminality, "the unsettled state in which previous orderings of thought and behavior are subject to revision and criticism" (according to anthropologists Victor and Edith Turner). Liminality occurs in any rite of passage, including events such as a pilgrimage or a vision. For twelfth-century poets needing to explore conflicting epistemologies, the philosophical vision was a useful vehicle for reflection. Typically the vision begins with a troubled or confused dreamer who is instructed by Nature or Reason, and it concludes with synthesis, understanding, and spiritual growth.

The specific visions that Lynch examines are Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae* (the late classical model for the others), Alain de Lille's *De Planctu Naturae*, Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*, Dante's *Purgatorio*, and John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. Her starting point is the "exuberant distaste" and misunderstanding that most modern readers bring to these texts. By identifying the genre of the philosophical vision and the critical role that each of the four latter works played in speaking to the problem of combining faith and reason, Lynch renders the poems clear and rhetorically effective. She resolves long-standing critical problems, such as the apparently superfluous presence of Genius in *De Planctu*. She argues that Jean de Meun's supposed heterodoxy is a misreading; his clearly flawed dreamer criticizes rationalism, but "the insistently moral and orthodox voice of Reason . . . qualifies every other perspective in the poem" (p. 138). Comparing

Dante and Gower, she sees remarkable similarities of purpose and of achievement.

In short, for those still concerned with the synthesis of reason and revelation (including many CCL members, I presume), Lynch's research will be of interest. She builds on the work of C. S. Lewis and Rosemond Tuve. Her writing is lively and accessible, in spite of the remoteness of the subject. My only problem with her prose is the use of "man" to refer to all humanity and the use of "he" and "his" to refer to God. I thought we were beyond that. Perhaps she uses these old forms because she is an assistant professor publishing her first book (a reworking of her dissertation). She would do well to read *Godding: Human Responsibility and the Bible* by Virginia Mollenkott, as a model of how to use gracefully inclusive language (see review in *C&L*, vol. xxxvii, no. 3, spring 1988).

On the other hand, Kathryn Lynch leads an inclusive life. I notice a husband and two children in her preface—which makes this book even more remarkable. Her synthesis of excellent scholarship with teaching, marriage, and motherhood is a wonderful achievement, perhaps only possible after the yoking of reason and faith.

