Doubt, Faith, and the World to Come in Peter of Cornwall’s *Book of Revelations*

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Center for Medieval Studies
University of Toronto

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the relationship between doubt and faith as it appears in a large collection of visions and revelations from the turn of the thirteenth century, entitled the Liber revelationum, or the Book of Revelations. The Liber revelationum was compiled in London by an Augustinian canon named Peter of Cornwall around the year 1200. He collected scores of visions and revelations from books, friends, and acquaintances in order to prove that angels, God, and the human soul existed. My work focuses on the first book of the collection dealing with proofs for life after death.

This study explores the context of this manuscript both in Peter’s works and also in the larger twelfth-century literary genres in which it participates. I interrogate the various means by which the spiritual world is revealed to the living. I question what exactly about the spiritual world is revealed, and what specific doubts these revelations address. Finally, I explore the culture of desire for contact with the spiritual world at the turn of the thirteenth century that is glimpsed through Peter’s collection and its immediate sources.

Peter’s work results from what he took as a central epistemological problem facing human beings: as a result of sin, humanity has lost the ability to directly know God. As a result,
it is natural to doubt His existence as He cannot be known through experience. Peter’s revelations address this doubt. I analyze the ways in which visions and revelations in their response to these doubts run up against recurrent restrictions and frustrations due to the very epistemological limitations that inspire them. These very shortcomings played a role in the process of faith to the religious culture around visions and the desire for them around the year 1200. This faith, which also required a similar separation from the divinity, exists in the same space as visionary and revelatory experience, defined by humanity’s limited ways of knowing and desire for a seemingly infinitely deferred transcendence. I argue that experiential medieval religion and belief, as glimpsed in Peter’s collection, requires and is enriched by doubt as well as challenged by it.
Acknowledgements

In the course of the research and writing of this dissertation, I have accumulated a number of debts. I would first like to thank my dissertation supervisor, Professor Joseph Goering, and my dissertation committee: professors Suzanne Akbari, Jill Ross, and Robert Sweetman, for their advice, guidance and patience. Professor Richard Sharpe graciously shared his work on the Liber revelationum before its publication, and I extend my sincere gratitude to him for this kindness. Professor Barbara Newman served as an insightful reviewer, providing important suggestions, corrections, and guidance. Professor Alexandra Gillespie served on the defence committee and offered a number of insights and suggestions. Professor James Carley provided indispensable encouragement and support. At the University of California, Davis, I benefitted greatly from my time spent with Joan Cadden and Sally McKee, under whose supervision the idea of this study took its initial shape. Many of my peers at the University of Toronto have contributed enormously to my work: Kaitlin Heller, Daniel Price, Caroline Smith, Rachel Stapleton, and Anna Wilson have all looked over parts of individual chapters, provided bibliographical suggestions, and helped me to develop the ideas presented in the following pages. Mary E. Barbezat and Mich P. Barbezat never wavered in their support. Victor Millete read through the manuscript and helped to catch numerous errors. Those that remain are my own.

In the early phase of writing, the suggestions I received at the 2011 MARCO Manuscript Workshop at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville helped me to identify issues in the collection that spoke to wider interests, and I would like to thank the faculty and staff there for their invitation.
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Appendix 1: List of Works in Book I of the Liber revelationum

Appendix 2: Oral Stories Section (Chapters 183-206) – Order of Stories Drawn from Stratford Langthorne and Lesnes
Introduction

In and around the year 1200 Peter of Cornwall, the prior of Holy Trinity, Aldgate, in London composed a massive collection of visions, miracles and other revelations. The work is some 462 folios long, and is divided into two books, the first dealing with revelations about the afterlife, and the second containing all other kinds of revelations. This collection, called the *Book of Revelations* (*Liber revelationum*), or less often *On Visions* (*De visionibus*), is remarkable both for the sheer number and complexity of its contents and also for the reasons behind its composition. Peter of Cornwall explains the purpose behind his work in the beginning of the prologue, stating that he has been driven to collect as many accounts of supernatural phenomena as he can find in order to respond to a particular set of doubts.

Even though almost all the nations of men, having discarded their idols, now believe that there is only one God; however, because, there are not a few who, thinking that God does not exist, consider that the world has always been just as it is now, and that it is ruled by chance rather than by the providence of God; and since there are many who, giving credence only to the things that they see, believe that neither good angels nor bad angels exist, nor that the soul of a man lives after his death, nor that other spiritual and invisible things exist – I Peter, minister of the Church of the Holy Trinity in London, running through the lives and acts of the saints by reading diverse volumes, for the utility of many, have collected into this one volume revelations and spiritual visions that happened to them, in which God or his angels, or souls, or once-dead men, are either seen or heard. Hence, I have seen fit to call this the *Book of Revelations*. Should someone devote themselves to reading through this book not less with the eyes of the heart than with the eyes of their body, he will not doubt that God, the angels, and human souls exist, and that they [human souls] live after the death of the body. And by the examples of the holy fathers, forgetting those things which are behind, he will reach out to future things (Phil. 3:13), and by reviewing the wonders of invisible things he will grasp with admiration how wonderful is God in his saints.¹

¹ Peter of Cornwall, *Liber revelationum*, London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 51, f. 2ra. Hereafter marked as LR. The translation is mine. All of the unique portions of this manuscript, as well as biographical information regarding Peter, his life and works, as well as other personages revealed in the collection are available in a recent publication by Richard Sharpe and Robert Easting, *Peter of Cornwall’s Book of Revelations* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2013). I extend my most sincere thanks to Professor Sharpe for allowing me access to this work before its publication. “Licet fere omnes hominum nationes abieictis idolis unum iam esse Deum credant tamen quia non nulli sunt qui Deum non esse putantes mundum semper fuisse sicut nunc est et casu potius quam prouidentia dei regi estimant, multique sint qui solum ea que uident pensantes, nec bonos angelos siue malos esse,
The invocation of outright disbelief in the existence of everything invisible to the senses is striking in so early a source, and raises questions regarding the presence and importance of doubt and skepticism in the Middle Ages.

Medieval doubt and skepticism have emerged as particularly promising but amorphous and contested topics. The word doubt can be used to describe a wide range of states along a spectrum, reaching from the slightest uncertainty to near total denial. Locating the doubt expressed or entertained by a medieval source along this continuum proves to be a controversial task. On the far end of the spectrum, the type of denial seemingly indicated in Peter’s introduction appears foreign to many accounts of the medieval mind. Lucien Febvre famously asserted that even in the sixteenth century no true atheism existed. Bernard Hamilton has echoed this sentiment for the medieval period. In the words of John Edwards, the assessments of Febvre and Hamilton would appear to indicate that “to claim that there was no God at all seemed to be beyond the possibilities of anyone.”

Recent works have sought to broaden the range for medieval doubt, allowing for an entire array of uncertainty up to and including outright disbelief. Susan Reynolds has argued that more room needs to be made for medieval doubt and that a great deal of medieval evidence, testifying

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2 Sabina Flanagan, *Doubt in an Age of Faith: Uncertainty in the Long Twelfth Century* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 2. Flanagan finds the idea of uncertainty as a spectrum formative for both the concept of medieval doubt as well as its written expressions.


to the potential reality of that doubt, exists. Walter Stephens believes that evidence for doubt in the existence of God can be found in the work of early witchcraft theorists. John Arnold, likewise asserts that unbelief and radical doubt were possible in the Middle Ages, and that historians can follow not only the traces of belief but also its absence in their work. He argues that we should pay closer attention to how belief operates within the specific social and cultural worlds of those doing the believing, rather than focusing exclusively on abstracted doctrinal systems. Robert Bartlett finds that English men and women had more freedom to think and choose than is often allowed to them by modern accounts, and he cites Peter of Cornwall’s words from the *Book of Revelations* as one example.

Peter Dinzelbacher, likewise, argues for the existence of disbelief, and in his work has attempted to identify its more prominent expressions. He argues that the existence of skepticism, disbelief, and even atheism, in the medieval period, needs to be explored in order for our image of the Middle Ages to be complete. In particular, he tracks doubt on the part of professed Christians in three recurrent positions, which he finds especially prominent: God’s activity in the world, the survival of the soul after death, and the divinity of Jesus. Expressions of skepticism in these three positions increase in frequency from the twelfth century onward, and recurrently appear linked to both a growing interest and concern with the everyday world, as opposed to the insensible and spiritual, and also an increasing engagement with the ideas found in ancient

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authors. It is in this context that he places Peter’s remarks found in the beginning of the *Book of Revelations*.11

C. S. Watkins advances a similar argument, using evidence drawn from twelfth-century Anglo-Norman historiographical sources. Writers such as Gerald of Wales, William of Newburgh, and Gervase of Tilbury observed and recorded phenomena with an increasingly critical eye and concern for a self-regulating nature, working independently from any divinity. These men found themselves, not without some anxiety, explaining the functions of the world in progressively more mechanical terms, based on the evidence gained from an empirical observation of it. This interest in the physical causes of things could appear as a solvent to faith, as it erased the need for any action on the part of invisible causes. Watkins places Peter’s compilation within this framework, responding to a “seeing-is-believing skepticism,” indicative of the empirical turn he outlines.12

Recent work has also suggested that the existence and process of medieval doubt needs to be understood in order to grasp the experience of medieval faith. Steven Justice has made just such a suggestion in his examination of the role belief and doubt played in medieval accounts of the miraculous. Like Peter Dinzelbacher, he maintains that an understanding of the presence of doubt is essential to an understanding of the Middle Ages. In particular, he argues that historians need to deal with the “act of faith” rather than positing a radically different medieval subjectivity that isolates medieval people and their reasons for believing completely from the modern scholar. In short, we need to deal fairly and openly with the explanations available to a medieval

observer or reader for a given event. Many of these potential and competing explanations for supernatural or miraculous events, Justice suggests, are clearly mundane or “natural.”

Justice finds the existence of these alternatives to supernatural causation essential to the existence of faith itself. One does not believe in what one sees, but rather one knows it. Faith, however, does not deal with things seen. In the type of belief leading to faith, one commits to propositions that are “often repellant to natural dispositions.” Belief involves an “imperfect certitude” in which “self is always talking to self, confronting assertion with doubt and doubt with assertion.” Belief in this fashion does not rescue the mind from agitation, but rather inflicts it. In Justice’s account, doubt is a prerequisite of faith, and, as a result, the type of believing that leads to faith implies some level of doubting.

As seen above, many of these conversations regarding medieval doubt, disbelief, and skepticism have used the words found in the remarkable prologue to Peter of Cornwall’s *Book of Revelations*, but they have not gone on to engage with the work as a whole. Beyond the wording of its introduction, Peter’s collection, as a selection of texts made by a medieval reader, provides a unique opportunity to explore the ways in which the discourse on the miraculous available to an Augustinian canon at the end of the twelfth century could be read, interpreted, and used. Peter culled his library and other collections available to him, transcribing select pieces of the texts he found into his collection if he felt they spoke to his purpose. In this fashion, the manuscript itself stands as a giant testimony to the reading and interpretation of scores of other manuscripts, especially as pieces of empirical proof for supernatural phenomena. Beside his written sources, including some of the oldest Christian literature in existence, Peter includes stories he heard

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13 Justice cites Aquinas, “Fides est de non visis,” ST IIIa q.7a 9 ad 1; however, he could just as easily have cited Hebrews 11:1 “est autem fides sperandorum substantia rerum argumentum non parentum,” or Augustine’s succinct dictum, “nam si vides non est fides,” *In Iohannis evangelium tractatus*, 68. 3, line 8.

14 Steven Justice, “Did the Middle Ages Believe in Their Miracles?,” *Representations* 103 (2008), 12-14.
orally from family, friends, and acquaintances. As a result, the Book of Revelations, in a significant number of its items, testifies to the contemporary oral world of discourse regarding the supernatural, intersecting with and relating to the written tradition. The Liber revelationum crystallizes a moment of discourse, both written and oral, regarding the supernatural, all centered on the issue of doubt.

This dissertation will attempt to explore the ways in which an understanding of the Book of Revelations as a consciously selected and edited body of texts contributes to our understanding of medieval belief and doubt around the year 1200. In particular, this study aims to approach medieval belief and doubt through the processes of visionary hermeneutics. It explores what the actual contents of the collection add to the oft-cited words found in its introduction. In the pages that follow, I will attempt to analyze how centuries of medieval writing come together at the turn of the thirteenth century through this collection as artifact. These different works blend together through Peter’s editorial work until they seem to speak with one voice. This voice represents a moment in the conversation between humanity and the spiritual world, frozen in the shape given to it by a medieval participant.

In order to make the study sustainable, I have limited my exploration to the first book of the manuscript, dealing with revelations concerning the afterlife. This delineation not only follows that found within the text itself, but it also focuses attention on the most unified group of themes present in the material, namely what things await the soul after death and the ways in which the living can gain some knowledge of them. The eschatological slant of this selection from the manuscript also provides an ideal space to explore questions of evidence and interpretation, which speak to a number of current debates and interests found in wider scholarship.
The following chapters explore different modes of visionary hermeneutics through the material found in the *Book of Revelations*. In many respects, the readings I offer below for Peter’s stories will parallel scriptural exegesis, beginning with various types of literal or historical interpretations that set the stage for more allegorical, spiritual, or interpretive approaches that build upon them. In this manner, some particularly rich examples will be explored repeatedly in different chapters, using different interpretive modes in each. Peter’s revelations constitute attempts to provide access to realities that normally escape direct human knowledge. How the stories in the *Book of Revelations* seek to impart some understanding of these often unknowable spiritual realities has much to teach modern scholars. In particular, the constant interplay between the invisible and the visible, or what can be known through the regular powers of the human mind alone as opposed to what cannot, plays a central role in the human approach to God. Faith arises within this dialectic as well as doubt.

The particular shape the dialectic between the sensible and the insensible takes in the *Book of Revelations* can speak to a number of scholarly discussions regarding interactions between the spiritual and material world in the late twelfth century. First, Peter’s collection prioritizes the observation of phenomena and the recording of human experiences as the starting point of knowledge. Secondly, in the case of visions and revelations, these experiential accounts often have to be read figuratively, in a process that calls for discernment between the literal and the allegorical. Third, in the interplay between what is observed and what meaning hides within observed phenomena, Peter’s sources engage directly with doubt in the context of human epistemology. Fourth, the *Book of Revelations* illuminates the emotional experience of doubt and of faith in its descriptions of the human desire for knowledge of the spiritual world.
Peter’s attention to observation recalls the sensibility detected by Watkins in his study of the supernatural in English historical works. One learns via observation through the senses, or, in the case of this collection, observation at least functionally indistinguishable from the senses. The accounts here compiled again and again stress sensory input, and above all else sight, as the key information that needed to be passed on to others as vicarious experiences. In the Book of Revelations, one will not find theological discussions of penance, judgment, the nature of purgation, the abilities of angels and demons, or the capabilities and experiences of the separated soul; rather, one encounters story after story out of which such discussions could be made or demonstrated. This is a collection of evidence, witnessed accounts from which conclusions can be drawn. The materials Peter assembled, of course, arose from centuries of theological conversations regarding the afterlife, but Peter read them as accounts of timeless truths that provide the materials for human knowledge of the spiritual world. The experiences he records are not to his mind didactic fictions, and in at least one instance Peter shows his willingness to exclude a source whose literal truthfulness he has come to question. ¹⁵ These revelations actually occurred to visionaries in the way they are described, and they spoke the language of the human senses in a way familiar to the living.

The observation of spiritual realities in sensory terms raises a number of interpretive and epistemological questions. Of course, unlike the usual objects of sense perception, spiritual realities often were not literally as they appeared. To take a very stereotypical example, those purged or tormented by heated metal were in fact not actually immersed within their bodies, as

¹⁵ The text in question is the Vision of the Monk of Eynsham, and I will argue below, in another chapter, that Peter likely knew individuals very close to the vision’s composition on both sides of a contemporary conflict over its veracity.
logically the dead no longer possessed them. So too one could argue that there were no otherworldly cauldrons of lead in which to torment immaterial spirits, and indeed that the places of purgation as well as Hell and Heaven in the period before the resurrection had no material characteristics at all. *Spiritualia* merely appear as *corporalia*, but this appearance is itself a didactic exercise, a kind of instructive fiction. Read in this way, Peter’s collection consists of true sensory encounters with the Other World that accurately describe images and sensations shown to a human being in order to grant some knowledge of the indescribable. These images and sensations, however, are not really what they seem.

Claude Carozzi has suggested that changes in the Latin visionary genre, which were in motion around the same time Peter created his collection, can be connected to a growing doubt regarding human epistemological access to the beyond. In particular, the idea that all the sights, sounds, and sensations visionaries recounted amounted to symbolism combined with concerns regarding how an individual could travel to the Other World to render large panoramic human visions of the beyond more trouble than they were worth. This solution explains the genre shift in Latin literature first noted by Dinzelbacher away from such panoramic visions towards limited, repeatable incursions of the supernatural to select individuals in this world.

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16 Some authors had played with the idea that souls take on a kind of aerial body that could interact with a corporeal Other World, as in the seventh-century *Vision of Barontus*, MGH SRM 5: 380. By Peter’s time, however, such a solution would be unusual, and in the opinion of figures like Hugh of St. Victor absurd, *De Sacramentis Christianae fidei*, ed. Rainer Berndt (Aschendorff: Monasterii Westfalorum, 2008), 2.16, 552-53.
17 One could find just such an argument in Augustine’s *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*, ed. Joseph Zycha. CSEL 28, 3, 2 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1894), 12.32, 426. “si autem quae sunt, cum anima de corpore exierit, utrum ad aliqua loca corporalia feratur an ad incorporealibus corporalibus similia, an uero nec ad ipsa, sed ad illud, quod et corporibus et similitudinibus corporum est excellentius, cito quidem responderim ad corporalia loca eam uel non ferri nisi cum aliquo corpore uel non localiter ferri.”
18 For one example, Hugh of St. Victor in his *De sacramentis Christianae fidei* advances this interpretation, 2.16, 553, ll 16-18. One can also find similar sentiments in the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great, 4.33 and 4.36.
see, some texts that Carozzi finds particularly significant to the developments he detects appear prominently in the *Liber revelationum* of Peter of Cornwall.

For a modern reader, the materials in the *Book of Revelations* combine the two strands examined above, namely naturalistic observation and figurative interpretation into an often-unstable assemblage indicative of its time. Peter’s stated criteria for his selections stress sensory encounters as possessing a privileged and desired truth-value. In seeming contradiction, however, a large amount of the content found in his excerpts stress that this sensory-based knowledge is incomplete. In the context of an engagement with doubt, this juxtaposition is compelling because one knows a thing exists by observing it; however, what one observes, the actual sensory characteristics reported, is suggested to be fictive, really a reflection indicating indirectly the existence of the thing “observed.” Peter often appears to hold both of these positions simultaneously, insisting on a degree of literal observation as well as figurative interpretation. Indeed, the “doubleness” of these revelations, the assertion of their literal truth as well as an awareness of their status as a sign, holds within it the key to what Peter hoped his collection would convey or inspire.

The direct engagements with doubt found in the collection build upon the human desire to observe and the difficulties this desire inspires when applied to spiritual realities. Observation and the limits of human observation, as found in this collection, exist within a conversation with doubt, but the picture of doubt or skepticism in the compilation, which emerges through a study of the actual contents of the manuscript, is far more multivalent than the words found in the prologue indicate. It will be my contention that the forms of disbelief, skepticism, and doubt, to which the materials in the collection actually appear to respond, exist on a spectrum from complete denial to uncertainty and curiosity. Beyond the existence of spiritual realities, the
excerpts found in the *Book of Revelations* answer a number of questions regarding the nature, activities and purpose of these realities. These elements of the collection, whose recognition and understanding would often fall under the purview of the “eyes of the heart,” form the most compelling and complex aspects of the material.

Important to an understanding of the ways these myriad doubts and curiosities appear is the desire for contact and knowledge of the spiritual world found in the collection. I would like to engage this desire as a key point of entrance into the material as well as to propose it as a necessary addition to the discussions surrounding the existence and functions of medieval doubt and skepticism cited above. The desire for revelation emerges as the guiding spirit behind a great deal of the individual materials and episodes found in the compilation as well as the collection and composition of the manuscript itself. I will argue that the most prominent written items included in the collection, as well as the oral stories included from Peter’s family, friends, and acquaintances all converge in this common respect. Peter’s sources were read and recounted in an atmosphere of desire for contact with the supernatural. This atmosphere of craving for a more direct knowledge of the spiritual is particularly evident within contemporary Cistercian culture, and appears prominently in the materials collected through Peter’s Cistercian contacts. This desire, however, is not limited to Cistercian materials and a better understanding of its prominence in the discourse surrounding visionary materials, crystallized by Peter of Cornwall in his collection, will illuminate an important moment on the verge of the major changes and transformations in humanity’s access to the Other World outlined by Dinzelbacher and Carozzi.

The emotional or affective states described in the *Book of Revelations* enable the final and most profound level of visionary hermeneutics I will explore in the collection. The collection begins and ends in various states of desire. Connected to these desires, are a host of other
emotional states that all participate in the initiation and the response to revelation. In my engagement with affective states in the collection, Stephen Justice’s argument regarding the importance of a direct engagement with medieval belief has been particularly formative. In my analysis of the plots glimpsed in a large number of Peter’s items, I will pay particular attention to the ways in which individuals are placed within an agitated dialogue with themselves, “confronting assertion with doubt and doubt with assertion,” and how these heightened states serve as the springboards for a large number of Peter’s items.

Peter’s revelations speak to human beings engaged with the current world who desire to reach beyond it. The current world and the human experience of it, called by Augustine the “realm of unlikeness” limits the accuracy of any discourse about the spirit and the divinity. In the proliferation of inaccurate discourses that constitutes the human attempt to describe the spirit and God, the reader of the compilation has the opportunity to develop the “eyes of the heart” that can reach beyond the text to touch the ineffable. The realignment of the individual towards the divinity through the images, sensations, and attachments of this world pervades the Book of Revelations of Peter of Cornwall and is Peter’s true goal in its composition.

Finally, the materials within Peter of Cornwall’s Book of Revelations are particularly promising in another respect for the way that they reveal the thinking of a mid-rank ecclesiastic as well as many of his peers. Rather than a study of the highest level of synthetic theology, this source promises to the modern student a connection with the often-messy world of people’s actual thought regarding what the Other World looked like and how human beings could have any knowledge of it. The stories Peter’s living peers told, combined with the stories he read, present a picture often far more varied regarding the structure and nature of the beyond than may sometimes appear through a study of sources originating from the highest intellectual level.
The following study will be broken up into four chapters. The first explores the life and work of Peter of Cornwall, the general contents of the manuscript, as well as the literary background to the *Liber revelationum*. Peter’s collection is one of many miracle collections created in the twelfth and thirteenth century, and their preoccupations and interests overlap with Peter’s in some notable ways. Likewise, contemporary historiographical works, like those tracked by Watkins, often hold the same materials found in the *Book of Revelations*. One needs to understand contemporary miracle collecting in order to gain a clear picture of how Peter of Cornwall’s project both fits into a larger literary, devotional, and historical moment, as well as stands out as unusual among its peers.

The second chapter examines the ways revelation is conveyed in the materials Peter collected, particularly the states in which individuals gain access to the spiritual world. While visionary epistemology has been discussed in a number of other works, I believe it is important to set out the picture that emerges through an encounter with the materials offered by Peter of Cornwall in the way that he chose to present them. For Peter, humanity’s lack of direct knowledge of the spiritual world is a disability caused by sin. Revelations respond to this disability. This response speaks the sensory language familiar to fallen humanity, but only under special circumstances. This chapter examines examples of these circumstances, as found in the *Liber revelationum*: the gift of special senses granted to spiritual athletes, as well as sensory experiences of the Other World arising from an encounter, of a varying nature, with death. Finally, this chapter discusses the possible problems and doubts seen in the material itself with these modes of conveyance.

The third chapter discusses the actual objects of revelation and the ways they are both known and not known through the shapes and descriptions they assume. The way the spiritual
world appears not only proves its existence, but also provides a great deal of information regarding its nature and purpose. As a result, this chapter examines the messages Peter’s material conveys regarding the spiritual world and spiritual creatures. In particular, in what shape does the Other World appear and in what ways can the human experience in the hereafter be affected by actions in this life? This chapter also explores issues arising from the corporeal descriptions of places and beings that lack material substance.

The fourth chapter focuses on the desire to encounter the spiritual world and the ways that desire mediates between the material and spiritual worlds. This chapter will examine the ways in which the atmosphere of desire for contact with, and knowledge of, the supernatural, proposed above, pervades Peter’s material and the context in which he collected it. Beyond desire for the supernatural, desires between people in the form of the enduring bonds between the living and the beloved dead, played an essential role in the mediation between the world of matter and the world of the spirit. This mediation of the dead mirrored the mediation of Christ and promised an eventual, transformative encounter with the divinity beyond the world of appearances and doubt.
Chapter 1 – The Contexts for the *Liber revelationum*: Author, Genres, and Contents

**Introduction**

My discussion of the materials present in the first book of the *Liber revelationum*, or the Book of Revelations, will depend upon a number of contexts for both the work and its author. This chapter will seek to establish these contexts, first by laying out a brief biography of Peter of Cornwall and his works, and then turning toward literature about the visionary and the miraculous in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. This chapter will end with a broad outline of some of the more important contents of the *Book of Revelations*, with clear emphasis given to the first book of the compilation. A number of charts, dealing with the contents and ordering of the manuscript can be found in the appendices, and may prove helpful in guiding the reader through the discussions of this fascinating but complex text.

My contextual discussion will center around recurrent epistemological and interpretive issues reflected in Peter’s works and interests, as well as in medieval visionary experiences more broadly. These questions have attracted a fair amount of attention from modern scholars, and the analysis of the *Book of Revelations* in following chapters will speak to a number of conversations in current scholarship. Of particular importance will be the rising interest and concern in the twelfth century with humanity’s interaction with the Other World, and the ways in which this interaction could be secured, manipulated, and described. The ways that the circumstances, under which these interactions came about, could themselves present opportunities for doubt will conclude my account of this new attentiveness towards relations with the spiritual world.
Section 1: Peter of Cornwall’s Life and Works

Richard Sharpe has established the biography of Peter of Cornwall in a number of publications.¹ I will re-present a large amount of this information here in order to facilitate an understanding of the ways Peter’s origins, activities, and position influenced both his interest in and also his understanding of the Other World. Of particular interest, both historically and for this dissertation, will be his family background, his institutional interests and responsibilities, as well as the general tenor of his intellectual pursuits. I will argue that a concern with rendering the invisible visible defines and unites his work and that an awareness of his work’s underlying thematic similarities can help prepare a reader to approach his Book of Revelations.

The dates for the major events in Peter’s life are known with some certainty. In the Book of Revelations, Peter states that he is writing in the year 1200 and that he is now some 60 years of age.² Following this evidence, his birth can be placed around the year 1140, and, according to information he provides regarding his family elsewhere in the manuscript, we can locate his birth in or near Launceston in Cornwall. His family had close connections to the Augustinian priory there, but Peter himself took his vows at the Mother House in London, Holy Trinity. This transition into the Augustinian order occurred when he was apparently over thirty years old, in the span between 1170 and 1180.³ He was elected prior of Holy Trinity on May 9, 1197. In 1210, King John sent him along with Abbot Benedict of Coggeshall to initiate negotiations with the

¹ Most of this work has now been gathered together into one volume dedicated to the Liber revelationum. Sharpe and Easting, Peter of Cornwall’s Book of Revelations, esp. 1-34. The reader may also find editions of almost all original material from the manuscript itself in this volume.
² LR 1.6 (23rb), Sixty years old; 1.6 (26rb), Year 1200.
³ Peter mentions attending a synod in the diocese of London with his Prior Stephen (1170-1197) soon after becoming a canon. There, he heard the sermon by Gilbert Foliot, the bishop of London (1163-1188), which led to the composition of the Pathelogus, Peter’s first work. In the prologue to the first part of the Pathelogus, Peter relates that Henry of Northampton (master of the schools before 1180) had inquired about how Peter continued his studies after becoming a canon. From this information, Sharpe infers the range of 1170-80, Peter of Cornwall’s Book of Revelations, 4-5.
exiled Archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton. In 1216 he, along with the heads of the other two principal churches of medieval London, St. Paul’s and St. Martin’s, excommunicated those pressing the claim of Louis VIII to the English throne. His death is recorded on July 7, 1221.

From information he provides in the Book of Revelations itself we know a great deal about Peter’s family. Sharpe believes that this material provides an “extremely unusual and perhaps unique” picture of the home a medieval writer left behind. Peter appears to have originated from the middling social class, and a brief family history can be put together for the generations immediately around him. His grandfather Ailsi appears as a gentleman and a burgess who held property in the area around the town of Dunheved from the canons of St. Stephen’s. Ailsi had three sons, Bernard, Nicholas, and Jordan, all but one of whom became clerics. The one son, who remained a layman, named Jordan, is Peter’s father and inherited the majority of Ailsi’s holdings. Jordan, in his turn, controlled substantial property and is described as an “oppidanus,” or townsman. He also possessed some knowledge of civil law that he used in court appearances. His land likely passed on to Peter’s brother, who is mentioned in passing as a source to consult regarding a story Peter wishes to tell about their grandfather. Regrettably, almost nothing else is known about this brother. Likewise, Peter mentions at least one sister, but

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7 Sharpe and Easting, 20-21.
8 LR, 1.6 (24rb).
9 LR, 1.6.8. The brother is not named. Peter wishes to consult him about a story regarding their grandfather’s care for a leper. A Richard of Trecarrel appears in a document from 1203. This man could be Peter’s brother or a nephew. Sharpe and Easting, 172.
no more information is given about her beyond the rough location of her husband’s house and the death of her child coinciding with that of their father.\textsuperscript{10}

A good deal of information exists regarding both of Peter’s uncles, Bernard and Nicholas, a fair amount of which is independent of Peter’s own work. Both men were clerics and worked as scribes in the administration of Henry I. Peter describes them as intimates of the royal circle, but Sharpe believes this characterization to be familial exaggeration. The landholdings and some of the legal activities of these three brothers can be confirmed through charter evidence, centering on Bernard, and the collection of documents relating to this family caught the eye of Richard Southern, who was the first to relate them to the information provided by Peter of Cornwall in his \textit{Liber revelationum}.\textsuperscript{11} Bernard clearly leaves the largest imprint, holding property in Cornwall and in and around London. Some of this property soon enough appears attached to Merton Priory. Likewise, Nicholas, about whom much less is known, became a canon at Merton after his royal service ended.

Peter acquired his knowledge of his family and its stories during his childhood through his father Jordan. The majority of Peter’s information regarding his family is conveyed through stories of the supernatural events and revelations that occurred to its members. These childhood memories often appear a bit misty as reflected in Peter’s vague dating and his references to incomplete recollection. In one instance, referred to above, he even relates that his memory of a pious episode involving his grandfather and a leper has failed completely and he needs to consult with his brother who may still remember the story. The space left in the manuscript for this tale

\textsuperscript{10} LR 1.6 (26rb), Sharpe and Easting, 200-201.

\textsuperscript{11} The documents are from a cartulary of Merton Priory, BL MS Cotton Cleopatra C. vii, fols. 99-100. They date mostly from the 1120s. R. W. Southern, “The Place of Henry I in English History,” \textit{Proceedings of the British Academy} 78 (1962), 127-69. In Sharpe’s opinion, Southern’s argument regarding how these documents can be read to chronicle the gradual reacquisition through royal service of family landholdings lost as a result of the Norman conquest, does not hold up under scrutiny. Sharpe and Easting, 148.
of Ailsi and the leper was never filled in, and it remains today almost as a symbol of the physical and social space left between Peter and his origins after he departed Cornwall for an education and a life in London.

Of his activities before becoming a canon at Holy Trinity, little is known for certain but some likely events can be inferred. His early education would probably have occurred near his birthplace, and the canons of St. Stephen’s at Launceston present possible candidates. It appears that his more advanced education took place at St. Paul’s in London. Peter indicates that he was a student of Henry of Huntington, very likely a master at St. Paul’s, and in the list of dedicatees for Peter’s later works, a social circle of sorts, originating in the school of St. Paul’s, takes shape. Beyond Henry of Huntington, Peter indicates familiarity with Ralph de Haute Rive, Henry’s successor as master of the schools. Likewise, Peter recounts that he and Godfrey de Lucy shared a teacher, probably Henry of Huntington. This reference reinforces the possibility that Godfrey was himself an alumnus of St. Paul’s. Godfrey de Lucy had family connections with Holy Trinity and would go on to become bishop of Winchester.\footnote{In particular, the priory’s holdings at Lesnes derived from his ancestor, as well as other holdings in the city of London itself, for example a lease by Peter refers to land given by Richard de Lucy, Cartulary \#64.} Regretfully, the level of Peter’s studies as well as their length remain opaque; however, Sharpe finds it suggestive that his contacts from St. Paul’s lasted longer than one might assume if the education he received there were limited to what one might call the “secondary” level.\footnote{Sharpe and Easting, 4.}

Peter’s life as a canon at Holy Trinity, Aldgate continued the close association with London initiated by his education at St. Paul’s. Holy Trinity stood, as its name implies, at the north-east corner of the city against the walls, beside its eponymous gate. Founded by Queen Matilda between 1107 and 1108, it was one of the earliest Augustinian foundations in England,
and was recognized as one of the three principal churches of the city.\textsuperscript{14} The prior also enjoyed the position of Alderman for Portsoken ward. The priory’s location gave it an importance beyond its financial assets, and the church benefitted from a number of powerful patrons, including King Stephen, who buried two of his children in its church, and Henry II, whose first son and daughter were baptised there.

While not on par with the wealthiest foundations in the kingdom, the priory’s assets made it the richest of London’s religious communities, and the majority of these properties were located within the city of London itself.\textsuperscript{15} The urban nature of the majority of the priory’s holdings inevitably involved Peter with town life to a considerable degree, and in this capacity his family background, packed as it was with propertied burgesses, doubtless proved beneficial. Beyond the city of London, the priory held significant properties, including land and the parochial church at Lesnes in Kent, as well as Braughing in Hertfordshire, among others.\textsuperscript{16} Holy Trinity’s comfortable financial position in Peter’s time is indicated by the respectable buildings whose broad outlines have been confirmed through a series of archeological investigations.\textsuperscript{17} Indeed, Peter made at least one addition to the priory church, a Lady Chapel, in which he was buried.\textsuperscript{18} Today only one arch remains above ground and the contents of the library, beyond the

\textsuperscript{14} Holy Trinity was preceded only by St. Mary’s in Huntington, St. Gregory’s at Canterbury, St. Botolph’s in Colchester, and Dunmow in Essex. J. C. Dickinson, \textit{The Origins of the Austin Canons and Their Introduction into England} (London: SPCK, 1950), 107-10. The position of Holy Trinity as one of the three principal churches is illustrated in Peter’s excommunication of the supporters of Louis VIII, Roger of Wendover, \textit{Flores Historiarum}, vol 2, 174-75.

\textsuperscript{15} Over fifty-seven percent of the priory’s income, both temporal and spiritual, originated in London. Gerald A. J. Hodgett, \textit{The Cartulary of Holy Trinity Aldgate}, xvi.

\textsuperscript{16} Both of these particular holdings will be significant in material from the \textit{Liber revelationum}, and Peter’s administrative concerns with these locations are documented in the cartulary. An agreement of 1199, under Peter of Cornwall, concedes some marshland held by the canons of Holy Trinity to the canons of Lesnes for 50 shillings paid quarterly, in which Holy Trinity is called the “matrix ecclesia de Liesnes,” Alfred William Clapham, \textit{Lesnes Abbey} (London: Cassio Press, 1915), 8. For Braughing or “Brackyng,” Cartulary, #1020.


\textsuperscript{18} Cartulary, #16, the mention of Peter’s burial is missing from Hodgett’s edition.
Liber revelationum, are largely lost. Significantly for the rest of this study, the contacts that Peter made in the course of administering Holy Trinity’s assets, both inside and outside London, provided important social channels for the stories found in the Book of Revelations as well as offering an audience for such stories.

Concerning Peter’s tenure at the helm of the priory, Holy Trinity’s institutional memory regarded him as foremost a teacher and a scholar. The priory’s cartulary, drawn up by Thomas de Axbridge between 1425 and 1427, memorializes Peter with the following words.

This prior enjoyed a great reputation as a teacher among the English teachers of his generation. He debated for three years with a clever Jew and converting him made him a canon of his own order. He wrote diverse books concerning this debate, and also the Pantheologus, the De reparacione lapsus, the De duabus corrigis predestinacionis et reprobationis, and many other very useful books which we still have in the priory, and of which copies still exist in other places in praise of the Trinity.

This list emphasises three attributes: work as an educator, anti-Jewish polemic, and authorship. As we will see, the list of works is incomplete and in one instance possibly mistaken, and Peter could not reasonably have actually been the foremost English teacher of his time, but these three broad themes under which he is remembered remain valuable and informative. Unlike the example of his predecessor Ralph, who was remembered for his financial and political acumen, Peter’s reputation rested on intellectual pursuits. It is from Peter’s activities as a teacher and a scholar that the Book of Revelations takes its origin and finds its context.

Peter authored a number of works, but their intellectual merit and interest has often been called into question. Richard Sharpe has aptly summed up the consensus regarding Peter as

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19 The arch is now inside Swiss Re House. The most visible sign of the old priory’s location is Mitre Square, which corresponds to the location and rough shape of the old cloister. Schofield and Lea, Holy Trinity Priory, 4-6. The house reverted to the crown in 1532 before the dissolution, and the contents of its library were never inventoried.

20 Cartulary, #16, I have largely followed both the translation and also the Latin citation provided by Sharpe as numerous details are missing from Hodgett’s edition of the text. Sharpe and Easting, 1-2.

21 Ralph was the second prior (1147-1167), who was succeeded by Stephen (1197-1221), Peter’s immediate predecessor. According to the cartulary, Ralph doubled the house’s revenues. #14.
author when he remarks that his works “are distinguished more by the effort and diligence with which they were compiled than by any penetrating thought or originality.” Peter’s appetite for material was prodigious, but his use of his sources often took the form of rearrangement, a kind of encyclopedic consolidation that fares very poorly in a comparison with more original and overtly synthetic thinkers. Nonetheless, his works indicate the inherited approach and solutions to a number of issues and they place him within a learned circle of men concerned with instruction and effective administration. His works, in order of composition if known, are:

Pantheologus (1189), Liber revelationum (1200-1202), De reparatione generis humani (before 1208), Liber disputationum Petri contra Symonem iudeum de confutacione iudeorum (1208-11), Liber Allegoriarum Petri contra Symonem iudeum de confutacione iudeorum (roughly 1208-11), and the De duabus corigiis predestinacionis et reprobationis. Of these, the Liber allegoriarum and the De duabus corigiis do not appear to have survived, and of the latter there is no mention outside of the cartulary.

The Pantheologus, Peter’s first work, was completed in 1189. Basically, a “subject concordance to the Bible,” it is truly massive in size, comprised of roughly some 800,000 to 900,000 words. The work is an early example of the distinctio method of biblical glossing. A biblical distinctio differentiates the various figurative meanings of a word in the Bible, providing for each meaning an example from the biblical text itself. The main demand behind medieval distinction collections originated in the composition of sermons, but this demand remained

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22 Sharpe and Easting, 18.
23 Sharpe does, however, entertain the possibility that this work is in fact the Liber revelationum, 18.
24 Sharpe has established the date based upon the presentation of the complete work to Ralph de Haute Rive before his departure for the Third Crusade. Ralph’s taking the cross is mentioned, 8-9.
25 Sharpe’s rough estimation, 9 n. 31.
26 Hunt, “English Learning in the Late Twelfth Century,” Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 4th Series, 19 (1936), 34. In this same article, Hunt printed the prologue to Part One.
intimately tied to the process of theological education that preceded a preaching career. Peter’s inspiration behind the *Pantheologus* arose from a sermon using an impressive array of *distinctiones*, given by Gilbert Foliot, bishop of London, soon after Peter became a canon, and the work aims to make the kind of composition Gilbert achieved possible for a wider number of preachers. Peter explains that by consulting the text preachers will be able to assemble sermons already made. Despite its enormous size, the *Pantheologus* appears to have had the warmest reception of any of his works, surviving today in seven complete or partial copies. These copies testify to a definite circulation over a considerable period of time.

The *Pantheologus* is broken up into a number of sections, and the different dedicatees named in each establish Peter’s early intellectual circle, centered on St. Paul’s, as proposed above. Part One is dedicated to Peter’s old teacher Henry of Northhampton, Parts Two and Three are dedicated to Ralph de Haute Rive, Henry’s successor, who helped procure scribes to copy the text as presented to him before his departure for the Holy Land. Part Four is directed to Godfrey de Lucy, the bishop of Winchester and Peter’s former classmate. These dedicatees reflect the intended audience and peer group for Peter’s first recorded literary effort. The possible influences and interests indicated by these men will be explored in a later section.

The *Liber revelationum* is Peter’s second work, about which a great deal will be said later; the present discussion will aim to highlight its stylistic and thematic similarities to Peter’s

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29 Hunt, “English Learning in the Late Twelfth Century,” 33-34. Peter recounts the impression this sermon made on him in the prologue to Part One (largely repeated in the prologues of Parts Two, Three and Four), “Totus enim sermo ille quibusdam distinctionis uariatus et flosculus urberorum et sententiarum depictus et copiosa auctoritatun subiectione roboratus, a principio per tramites suos ad idem principium decurrebat et recurrebat ut areolas agrorum multiplicibus riulorum tractibus uniformi dissimilitudine exarartes et multiplici uernantis germinis fructu inter carnalium decursus fecundates cogitares nec hominem sed super hominem esse, qui tanta auctoritatum copia per singulas sermonis discintiones superhabundare potuisset affirmares.” Printed in Hunt, “English Learning,” 41.
31 A complete list of these extant MSS as well as ones attested can be found in Sharpe and Easting, 32-33.
other works. Like the *Pantheologus*, the *Book of Revelations* is massive in size, comprised of about half a million words on 462 folios.\(^3\) Like its predecessor, it is largely a compilation of information distilled from wide reading. Most importantly, it too aims to serve in the creation of sermons or instruction in the classroom by making this information more readily available. This last point will require more evidence and argument to be convincingly established, and this discussion will be forthcoming in later sections, but I foreground it now in order to place this interpretation within the context of Peter’s other efforts. On a more abstract, but perhaps equally important level, the impulses behind both works meet in the goal of making visible what is often invisible. While the *Pantheologus* is concerned with distinguishing the figurative meanings of a word that may not be readily apparent, the *Liber revelationum*, as seen in its opening remarks, seeks to provide examples of spiritual realities that are often unseen. Abstracting the figurative interpretations of a word, and grasping the spiritual workings behind the visible aspects of creation were thematically linked activities in medieval hermeneutics.\(^3\) A consideration of Peter’s other works will further illustrate how this linkage joins his literary output together elsewhere.

Peter completed the *De reparatione generis humani* before his *Book of Disputations*, placing its composition in the period before 1208. Like the works that came before it, its size is generous, with 203 extant folios.\(^4\) In keeping with Peter’s style, it is made up largely of excerpts from other works. The work grew out of Peter’s meditation on the *prognosticum* from the consecration of Bishop Gilbert Glanvill of Rochester: (John 12:31) “Now is the judgment of this

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\(^3\) Sharpe and Easting give the proximate count as 517,000 words.

\(^3\) Henri de Lubac charts a number of references to this concept in his *Medieval Exegesis: The Four Senses of Scripture*, vol I, trans. Mark Sebanc (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1998-2000), esp. 78-9. He summarizes, “Those who are attached solely to the letter and the variety of its details are like those who come to a stop at the shimmering surface of this world.”

\(^4\) The work had effectively been lost since the nineteenth century but was re-identified by Sharpe, “Peter of Cornwall’s *De reparatione lapsus*: A ‘Lost’ Work Traced,” *Scriptorium* 38 (1984): 79-81.
world, now shall the prince of this world be cast out.” Peter collected the works he had found as a result of his own ruminations prompted by this verse, and organized them into one volume. He dedicated the whole to Gilbert Glanvill. Today, the work survives in one incomplete copy held at the Somerset Record Office.³⁵

The Liber disputationum Petri contra Symonem iudeum de confutatione iudeorum, Peter’s fourth work, apparently took shape during the Great Interdict between 1208-11. This work and its sister volume the Liber allegoriarum Petri contra Symonem iudeum de confutatione iudeorum supposedly resulted from the series of debates mentioned in the cartulary between Peter and a “clever Jew,” who is revealed in the work itself as Simon. Like Peter’s other works, it consists of excerpts from other texts on a given subject gathered together. Originally, it would have been introduced by the Liber allegoriarum, a biblical compilation of material for the debate, but this text does not survive. The Liber disputationum itself now exists in an early fifteenth-century copy, which does attest to some circulation.³⁶ Peter dedicated the work to Stephen Langton, and Sharpe finds it likely that he intended to present a copy to the archbishop at their meeting in 1210.³⁷

An anti-Jewish polemic, in light of Peter’s other works and especially the Liber revelationum, is highly significant as it underscores the basic similarities within his works. In the genre of writing to which Peter’s Book of Disputations belongs, Jews served as a foil to Christian interpretive processes and as embodiments of spiritual failure. They were unable to see how the books of the Old Testament foretold the life and mission of Christ. As the title of Peter’s lost volume suggests, they could not see biblical allegories. They only read the letter and not its spiritual meaning; they study the body and miss the soul. Jeremy Cohen terms this medieval

³⁵ Somerset Heritage Centre, DD/AH/66/17.
³⁶ Eton College, MS 130.
³⁷ Sharpe and Easting, 16.
method of regarding Jewishness as the “Hermeneutic Jew.” Jews were condemned by their literal-mindedness, materialism, and carnality to await Christ’s return when the invisible truth they refused to believe will be made openly manifest before their eyes. According to Bernard of Clairvaux, Jews constituted a category of disbelief based upon their inability to intuit spiritual truths from visible signs. Likewise, Peter the Venerable argued that miracles formed the best possible response to Jewish disbelief. It is easy to see the similarities between these conceptions of Jews and appropriate approaches to them and the opening words of the Liber revelationum.

As I have already suggested, there are a number of thematic similarities which run through Peter’s corpus that go beyond mere similarities in compositional method and style. Two of these are simple stylistic similarities: namely, size and excerpting from the works of others. More substantive similarities can be found in the apparent correspondences between the intended uses for his works. Peter appears to have set out primarily to provide aids for the composition of sermons and the religious instruction that formed a necessary backdrop to this task. His efforts aimed to provide a studious reader with a wide range of authorities and materials that could then be used to various ends.

Most importantly, however, his works are joined together by a shared concern with rendering the invisible visible. Two of his works, the Pantheologus and the Liber disputationum concern themselves directly with the figurative interpretation of the Bible, and the Book of Disputations combines this concern with a polemic against a group that supposedly rejects this way of reading and believing in favor of the literal. The Book of Revelations likewise takes aim

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at the literal mind, providing moments where spiritual realities are made available to the senses to demonstrate their existence. Finally, the *De reparatione* also seeks to abstract from the immediately apparent to arrive at a closer approximation of a spiritual message. It is a desire for this movement from the superficial to the spiritually significant that defines Peter’s oeuvre, as well as a desire to facilitate a similar path for others. Attached to this desire to assist others, one may detect an anxiety that what is not immediately visible may be missed, and that part of the process of providing easier access for others must respond on some level to a possible rejection of what is not readily apparent.

Peter’s works and concerns fit into larger developments regarding texts, their interpretation, and the articulation of community in the eleventh and twelfth centuries identified by Brian Stock. Stock argues that in this period texts increasingly came to govern human communications, in both their written and oral forms. Shared interpretive methods and shared interpretations of these texts progressively came to articulate a sense of community.⁴¹ Peter’s literary works illustrate just such a concern with establishing community through shared interpretive modes in his engagements with Jews, visions, and exegesis. In particular, the *Book of Revelations* can be seen as an attempt to merge the individual experiences recorded from its oral informants with patterns articulated through the accumulation of venerable textual exemplars.⁴² Likewise, the very revelatory experiences recorded by Peter’s informants evidence a clear familiarity with other revelatory texts, as I will argue below. These texts appear to have helped to fashion these experiences, their later oral communication as stories, and then their eventual integration into the written corpus in the form of the *Book of Revelations* itself.

With the body of texts Peter authored in mind, we can now turn towards matters more directly oriented to a consideration of the Liber revelationum itself. Before a description of the manuscript, its contents, and its methods of composition, it is necessary to map out roughly the literary genres in which it participated around the year 1200. I will first briefly define revelation literature, before proceeding to explore its state around the time Peter composed his collection of visions and miracles. Following my focus on the first book of the manuscript, I will pay particular attention to the visionary tradition, with which Peter interacted and contributed. This visionary tradition will take us into contact with a number of seemingly distinct genres, from saints’ lives and historiographic works even as far as travel accounts. Taken as a whole, the picture presented will provide a context for the interpretation of Peter’s collection.

Section 2: Writing and Collecting Revelations Around the Year 1200

In his study of medieval revelation literature, Peter Dinzelbacher offers a broad definition for it as a literary genre arguing, “Any text that appears with the claim that it announces a direct message from God (or his saints and angels) belongs to the literary genre of revelation literature.” He further divides this category into five types: visions and dream visions, psychic phenomena, auditions, glossolalia and inspired writing, and finally Heaven and Hell Letters. In practice, maintaining clear boundaries between these types is difficult, and the materials offered within the Book of Revelations partake in a number of them. Of these, visions and dream visions are the most prominent group, especially in the first book dealing with the afterlife, but the materials actually present in the entirety of Peter’s manuscript even surpass Dinzelbacher’s list in

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43 P. Dinzelbacher, Revelationes, Typologie des sources du Moyen Âge occidental 57 (Brepols: Turnhout, 1991), 16. “Jeder Text, der mit dem Anspruch auftritt, eine unmittelbare Botschaft Gottes (oder seiner Heiligen und Engel) zu verkünden, gehört zur literarischen Gattung des Offenbarungsschrifttums.”

44 Dinzelbacher, Revelationes, 16-17.
the form of numerous miracles that can only claim to be divine messages in a less than truly
direct sense. What is most important to establish at the onset is that what defines the genre is its
existence as a form of communication between God and man. This communication overcomes
inherent limitations in human reason and epistemology. It is this sense that is central to an
understanding of Peter’s use of the term to describe moments where the normally insensible
spiritual world is made accessible to human beings. It is through a consideration of this broadest
of all possible understandings for revelation that Peter’s diverse materials come together. As a
result, the context for Peter’s compilation is not only “revelation literature” per se, but also the
miraculous in general.

Painting even a brief picture of human interactions with the spiritual world and its forces
in Latin literature at the turn of the thirteenth century is a daunting task, and in what follows I
will aim only to highlight developments especially relevant to the *Book of Revelations*. First, I
will examine visionary literature, before turning to developing ideas about the afterlife and the
Other World. Next, I will consider the miraculous as a category in general, highlighting some
contemporary notions surrounding miracles’ causality. Finally, I will explore a select group of
miracle and wonder collections which provide analogues to Peter’s own. Running throughout
this discussion will be issues connected to two axes: how these phenomena function as modes of
communication, and the ways in which this communication becomes increasingly troubled and
insecure. First, the Latin visionary genre, at the turn of the thirteenth century, stood on the edge
of major transformations that would lead to the end of the type of tour-like visions of the Other
World that formed such a prominent part of Peter’s collection. Secondly, this shift can be
connected to questions regarding the interpretation of visionaries’ accounts. Interpretation,
however, was not the only locus for discomfort as anxieties regarding the causation of visions
became more prominent, particularly regarding the potentially artificial nature of experiences achieved through meditative techniques and as well as the implications of an increasingly medicalized dream theory.

**Visions and Revelations**

A number of scholars have noted the ways in which the twelfth century plays a pivotal role in the developments of visions and visionary accounts. In Dinzelbacher’s opinion, this century served as both a high point and a pivot where revelation literature as a genre began to shift in both its character and participants. The twelfth century produced some of the longest and most detailed visions of the hereafter as well as new mystical material of a type that would become predominant in later centuries. Especially within these new mystical revelations, laypeople and women began to become more prominent as both audience and participants.\(^45\) Dinzelbacher first charted this shift in his seminal *Vision und visionsliteratur im Mittelalter* in which he argued that, after the first part of the thirteenth century, Latin-language panoramic visions of the Other World came to an end. Thereafter, visionary literature tended to focus more on limited, repeatable experiences designed to convey spiritual messages to select individuals, rather than on lengthy, tour-like human journeys into the Other World. This new focus brought with it increased lay involvement, especially in the form of women, as well as increased use of the vernacular.\(^46\) The shift to this new type began in the twelfth century and for a time co-existed with the Latin panoramic genre before supplanting it after the first quarter of the thirteenth.

Claude Carozzi has offered some reasons for this change in humanity’s contact with the Other World, suggesting that questions regarding human epistemological access to the Beyond lie behind it. In his exhaustive survey of Latin literature regarding the journey of a living soul to


the Other World, Carozzi roughly groups his sources’ periods by their emphasis on literal or figurative interpretation of visionaries’ accounts. The first period, which set the foundations for the genre, focused on the figurative interpretation of visionaries’ accounts, and especially the places they visited and objects with which they interacted, following the preferences of Augustine and Gregory the Great. The second period, which witnessed the creation of the genre proper and ended with the Carolingian era, shifted towards a more literal approach, emphasizing a parallelism between the separated soul’s experience in the hereafter and that of regular human life. Finally, the last phase corresponds to the twelfth-century highpoint of the genre. The emphasis here moved again towards figurative interpretation, but was accompanied by a newfound anxiety regarding the tension between symbolic and realistic descriptions.47

Carozzi terms this last phase, the late twelfth and early thirteenth century, a “time of doubt” regarding otherworldly visions.48 By the early thirteenth century, a tendency towards pure symbolism was largely complete and realistic apparitions and limited experiences, like those identified by Dinzelbacher for the later Middle Ages, raised fewer questions regarding interpretation and basic human anthropology. From then on, direct human access to the Other World itself was shut off, and the preferred approaches were largely symbolic or mystical. Carozzi concludes that the genre of Latin spiritual journeys to the Other World ended as a result of this time of doubt. He stresses that this uncertainty was not doubt about the reality of the spiritual world, but rather doubt regarding the possibility of direct human knowledge of it and access to it.49

47 Carozzi’s argument is diffuse and takes shape over the course of a very long analysis of over six hundred pages. *Le voyage de l’âme dans l’au-delà d’après la littérature latine (Ve-XIIIe siècle)* (Paris: École française de Rome), 1994.
A number of scholars have described a similar set of developments to those charted by Carozzi. Carol Zaleski has famously described the literalist, or corporeal, tendency Carozzi charts, in other words, the soul’s tendency to appear and act as a similitude of the body as “the somatomorphic soul.” This penchant often provoked embarrassment for medieval commentators of all periods as well as modern readers, but proved irresistible and essential to any storytelling about the soul’s experiences because “an abstraction cannot act in the imagination.”\(^{50}\) Caroline Walker Bynum took this term and used it in her argument regarding the medieval tendency to view the self as a psychosomatic unity. Challenging this unity equalled a challenge to the survival of identity and personhood after death.\(^{51}\) These arguments focus on the continuity of personhood and the individual in the sources and not the way the Other World and its denizens appear, but their tenor confirms Carozzi’s observation that the apparently material appearances of both souls and the Other World directly connect to wider theological and anthropological issues.

Beyond doubts regarding the interpretation of visions, the causation of visionary experiences themselves increasingly provided room for doubt in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Barbara Newman has detected a growing unease in medieval sources with the devotional and meditative techniques behind a great deal of medieval visionary experience. She suggests that a monastic culture that cultivated visions as a type of “meditative reading” lies behind the accounts of many medieval visions. This was a culture in which “I saw” could mean “I learned to see.” Often, literary accounts of visions obfuscated the techniques used to produce them because the authority, or truth, of a vision could not survive the “acknowledgement that it


had been sought or improved by the seer."\textsuperscript{52} This tension eventually led the clergy to largely abandon visionary experience to the laity.\textsuperscript{53} In Newman’s argument, the way visions were sought, once admitted, could lend them an air of artificiality. This often conscious need to disguise the actual methods behind an experience called into doubt the epistemological and experiential basis for visions in general.

Steven Kruger, in his study of medieval dreaming, has also identified the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as a time of increased doubt regarding the causation of apparently prophetic or visionary dreams. Dreams from the time of the Fathers could stem from physiological and psychological causes, as well as external and spiritual ones. These dreams, arising from external causes provided a space for meaningful communication between the material and spiritual worlds, and can be, and indeed often were, termed visions. In the twelfth century, somatic explanations for dreams, while earlier deemphasized, became more prominent. Over time, and under Aristotelian influence, somatic and psychological causation even gained ground against all potential spiritual causes, calling any claims to revelatory dreams into even greater doubt than before.\textsuperscript{54} Once again, the time around the year 1200 is identified as an important period in which human epistemological access to the beyond became more problematized.

In the work of all these scholars there is a broad agreement on a rough set of related developments, centering on the period around the turn of the thirteenth century. The imagery used in visionary narratives, the language of their communication, became more difficult to interpret. This difficulty could arise in a number of fields. It could emerge through an increasing attention to, and concern with, causation, or the nature of the imagery a visionary reported. The

\textsuperscript{53} Newman, “What did it Mean to Say ‘I Saw?’” 43.
\textsuperscript{54} Steven F. Kruger, \textit{Dreaming in the Middle Ages} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), esp. chapters four and five.
The problem of causation itself could refer to physiological processes that could reduce these messages to mere physical processes without an external meaning. Likewise, these visions could be imaginative compositions, meditatively sought but not received as described, reducing their authority. Even if the imagery arose from an external cause, one could question if it actually revealed a place or state as it was, or if it simply delivered a message under an allegorical cover like a fictional, literary composition. Interpretive and explanatory possibilities proliferated, and the process of sorting through these alternatives became increasingly urgent.

The Developing Other World

Besides the nature of visions, the Other World and its denizens that were revealed in such experiences took on new emphases and prominence in the twelfth century. This movement is especially evident in the pains suffered by the dead in the hereafter and the effects of suffrages offered by the living upon them. Jacques le Goff has argued that Purgatory as a defined place in the cosmic order took form in this period, and while the particulars of his argument can be contested, the increasing prevalence of human interaction with the dead and their fates in the beyond, which he identifies, cannot. Various accounts laid out with increasing frequency and detail the sufferings awaiting the majority of human souls in the beyond, who, while not damned, still merited significant punishment before they could enjoy paradise. The living could alleviate this suffering through an economy of exchange with the hereafter mediated through the ecclesiastical hierarchy. While suffrages for the dead were not a new development of the twelfth century, they did explode into literary prominence in that century from the springboard of

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the monastic communities that had nurtured them.\textsuperscript{57} Testimony to both the need for these suffrages and also their effectiveness was provided by the accounts visionaries brought back with them from the Other World and by the dead themselves, who sought out the living to ask for them. Jean-Claude Schmitt has termed these needy apparitions an “invasion of ghosts.”\textsuperscript{58} The domain of the dead was brought increasingly into contact with that of the living, and the responsibilities that the living bore towards the departed acquired an ever more prolific body of supportive eye-witness accounts.\textsuperscript{59}

Accounts revealing the efficacy of suffrages for the dead existed in a sometimes polemical context with opinions that rejected them. Indeed, these opinions often travel within the accounts themselves, as presuppositions that are disproven.\textsuperscript{60} Our sources, from the mid-eleventh century onwards, recurrently accuse various heretical groups of denying the idea of purification after death and the role of clerical mediation in securing it.\textsuperscript{61} The most prominent of these heretics, particularly the Cathars, also often appear to reject the idea of any positive relationship, like that portrayed in the “trans-secular” economy of suffrages, between the material and the

\textsuperscript{57} The growth in suffrages for the dead owed a great deal to Cluny and its influence. For example see, Giles Constable, “Commemoration and Confraternity at Cluny During the Abbacy of Peter the Venerable,” in \textit{Die Cluniazenser in ihrem politisch-sozialen Umfeld}, eds. Giles Constable, Gert Melville, and Jörg Oberste (Müster, 1998): 253-78.


\textsuperscript{59} Patrick Geary has stressed that the dead remained a part of human society in the Middle Ages, with obligations owed to them. This situation aptly describes both the materials related to saints on which he focuses, as well as the ghostly invasion of the twelfth century: Patrick J. Geary, \textit{Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 2.

\textsuperscript{60} A classic example is the exchange between the ghost of a young man, a priest, and the Bishop of Orange via the dead man’s cousin found in Gervase of Tilbury’s \textit{Otta Imperialia}, 3.103, in which the priest and the bishop ask question after question to the spirit aimed at verifying basic elements of their faith (perhaps also asking questions to which the cousin alone would not know a completely acceptable answer).

\textsuperscript{61} Among the individuals or groups that rejected prayers for the dead and/or Purgatory were: Henry the Monk, Peter of Bruis, the Waldensians, the Cathars, the Lollards, and “Radical Hussites.” The Cathars in particular viewed earthly existence itself as a type of purgatory. M. D. Lambert, \textit{Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from Bogomil to Hus} (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), esp. chapters 5-8.
spiritual worlds. These recurrent voices of dissent against the conception of the Other World and interaction with it are approached by current historians in different and often contradictory ways. The dissent developed and increasingly expressed in this period can reflect both genuine rejections of the orthodox account of the relationship between the spiritual world and the world of matter, as well as the reified anxieties and concerns of various elements in the learned elite. Whatever the status of this difficult and still divisive question, stories regarding travel and interaction with the beyond proliferated in some kind of a direct relationship to the extant traces of opinions that rejected their bases.

**Miracles as a Category**

The miraculous as a category underwent a process of definition and development in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. As travel in both directions between worlds became more prominent, ideas of how action originating from the spiritual world could affect the here-and-now took shape in a developing literature surrounding the wondrous and the miraculous. Central to the idea of the miracle was its status as a form of communication, just as was the case for visions. Miracles were signs, signifying the existence of God and his creatures. They existed as a way to cross the space between the regular, material world and the normally invisible spiritual one. The confounding of expectations was central to the ability of miraculous phenomena to signify. The wondrous disrupted the anticipated course of regular events as well as the ability of

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62 The “classic” view of Cathar doctrine holds that they believed in a strict separation between matter and spirit, with the world of matter acting as a kind of prison for the soul. True happiness would come with final freedom from matter.

63 The issue of how to read texts about heresy and heretics for evidence of people’s true beliefs is a difficult one. In particular, the work of scholars like R. I. Moore has suggested that heresy as it comes down to us is entirely constructed in the cultural context of the texts’ authors. *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250*, 2nd ed. (Malden: Blackwell, 2007). Too often such a solution is unsatisfactory. L. J. Sackville explores some approaches to textual representations of heretics in his *Heresy and Heretics in the Thirteenth Century: The Textual Representations* (Rochester: York Medieval Press, 2011).
the observer to explain the disruption.\textsuperscript{64} These signs spoke primarily not to believers but rather to disbelievers or skeptics with wavering faith.\textsuperscript{65} Miracles could confound the faithless and perhaps open up a space in which they could later pursue faith, or miracles could reaffirm or console the faithful. The miracle could represent a moment of catharsis in the process of confrontation between doubt and assertion, as discussed by Justice in his exploration of medieval belief.\textsuperscript{66}

In the twelfth century, scholars and theologians attempted to distinguish the miraculous from the regular course of nature in a process that would eventually lead to the need for greater proof for reported miracles. In the works of Anselm and those that followed him, the older Augustinian definition of the miraculous as an acceleration of the “seminal reasons” present in nature by its divine design gave way to approaches in which the divine and the natural became ever more separate, and by the thirteenth century miracles could be regarded as suspensions or disruptions of nature rather than its acceleration or mechanical manipulation.\textsuperscript{67} This attention to the processes of nature and how they may or may not underlie miraculous events could radically limit the number of phenomena called miracles as opposed to unusual but natural events.\textsuperscript{68} Just as was the case with dreaming, or even the types of guided visionary experiences identified by Barbara Newman, mundane explanations crowded the field, creating an area in which supernatural causation had to be discerned from natural causation with greater effort.

\textsuperscript{64} Hence the name taken from \textit{mirus}, “wonderful, amazing, extraordinary.”

\textsuperscript{65} Paul, 1 Cor. 14:22, “Signs are not to them that believe, but to them that believe not.” Michael E. Goodich, \textit{Miracles and Wonders: The Development of the Concept of Miracle, 1150-1350} (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 8-10.

\textsuperscript{66} Justice, “Did the Middle Ages Believe,” 13.

\textsuperscript{67} Goodich, \textit{Miracles and Wonders}. For Augustine on the miraculous, 13-14; for later developments, 21-27.

\textsuperscript{68} This new attention to the mechanics behind nature and its processes was linked to the “new” Aristotle. Benedicta Ward, \textit{Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record, and Event} (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1982), 5-6. Goodich argues that this approach to miracles could greatly reduce their numbers. Goodich, \textit{Miracles and Wonders}, 27.
Collections of Miracles and Visions
At the same time as the miraculous and the natural as categories underwent further definition, authors created a number of notable miracle collections. A flood of miracle collections came into existence in England, detailing the actions of its saints in the period after the conquest. Largely beginning with Goscelin of Bertin and continuing into the twelfth century proper within the works of authors like Osbern of Canterbury, Eadmer of Canterbury, Benedict of Peterborough, and William of Canterbury, ecclesiastics turned increasingly to the oral world of storytelling about the miraculous around them and recorded it in writing.⁶⁹ This new attention to miracle stories and their recording appears prominently in the literature of the twelfth century, especially the fifteen years after 1170.⁷⁰ By the mid-thirteenth century, however, miracle collecting in England by clerical authors died out. This end to the genre was possibly linked to the increasingly formalized requirements for what could be called miraculous and recorded as such. We can find examples of this formalization in the development of the canonization process and the increasingly difficult extrication of the miraculous from the natural or demonic.⁷¹

Accounts of miracles and wonders exploded onto the European stage in the twelfth century. This invasion of stories first took root in the monastic world and was nurtured by figures like Anselm of Canterbury and Peter the Venerable. Anselm’s storytelling, like that remembered in the Dicta Anselmi, paved the way for entire future genres, such as the Miracles of the Virgin

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⁶⁹ Rachel Koopmans, Wonderful to Relate: Miracle Stories and Miracle Collecting in High Medieval England (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). One of the main arguments in Koopmans’ book is that the sudden emergence of English miracle collections does not represent an explosion in the number of miracle stories being told orally; rather it represents a new clerical interest in them and their preservation.

⁷⁰ Koopmans, Wonderful to Relate, 130. Koopmans calls this surge in miracle stories after Thomas Becket the “most productive in English history.”

⁷¹ An example of this increasing caution can be found in, Michael Goodich, “Vision, Dream, and Canonization Policy under Pope Innocent III,” in Pope Innocent III and his World, ed. John C. Moore (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 151-63.
and exempla collections more broadly. Peter the Venerable combined an interest in the miraculous with a concern with unbelief, particularly that of Jews and Muslims, authoring a collection of miracles, *De Miraculis*, and a number of polemics including *Adversus Iudeorum inveteratam duritiem*, and *Contra sectam Sarracenorum*. Anselm and Peter the Venerable’s attention to stories, particularly stories of visions and miracles set the stage for later trends, at first eagerly picked up by their monastic contemporaries.

The Cistercians were particularly avid collectors of miracles and wonders, producing many large collections. In addition to the two miracle-heavy lives of St. Bernard, Cistercian authors produced many books devoted entirely to miracles in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries: a collection of miracles and visions was compiled under Prior John (1173-1178), Herbert of Clairvaux authored his *Liber miraculorum* around 1178, and Goswin of Clairvaux compiled yet another book of miracles between 1192-1200. Herbert’s *Liber miraculorum* in particular would provide much material for Conrad of Eberbach’s *Exordium magnum Cisterciense* (c. 1220), and influenced later, celebrated Cistercian collections such as Caesarius of Heisterbach’s *Dialogus miraculorum* (1223). Herbert’s collection also influenced stories that

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74 For the purposes of this study, the lives of Bernard alluded to are the *Vita prima* and the *Vita secunda*. The *Vita prima* has a complicated textual history, consisting of contributions by Geoffrey of Auxerre (materials for all books, and likely Books III-V), William of St. Thierry (Book I, working from Geoffrey’s notes), and Arnold of Bonneval (Book II). Geoffrey also made a collection of miracles worked by the living Bernard that sometimes travels as the sixth book of the *Vita prima*, the *Miracula in itinere Germanico paratis* (PL 185: 349-416). The *Vita secunda* came together after 1165 under Alain of Auxerre. For a detailed discussion of these texts, their recessions, and their history, Adriaan H. Bredero, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Between Cult and History*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996). Prior John’s collection has only recently been identified, Brian Patrick McGuire, “A Lost Clairvaux Collection Found: The *Liber visionum et miraculorum* Compiled Under Prior John of Clairvaux,” *Analecta cisterciensia* 39 (1983): 27-62. Herbert’s collection, PL 185: 1270-1384, lacks a modern edition. Goswin’s collection is lost.
Peter of Cornwall encountered and recorded in his *Book of Revelations*. The Cistercian tradition of storytelling regarding the supernatural would have a great influence on the “rise of the exemplum” as a literary genre, and in that form affected many levels of European society in the thirteenth century and beyond.\(^75\)

Visions, miracles, and wonders also found a prominent place in twelfth-century historiographical works. In particular, a number of Anglo-Norman authors have attracted considerable attention for their use of the supernatural. William of Malmesbury, William of Newburgh, Gervase of Tilbury, Gerald of Wales, Walter Map, and Roger of Wendover, to name a few, all included significant numbers of stories featuring visions, wonders and miracles in their work.\(^76\) Many of these appearances reflect, or even actively play with, interpretive uncertainties or ambiguities connected with these phenomena. One can find examples of such moments in William of Newburgh’s tales of the Green Children, or the toad in the rock, or the multiple versions of the Melusine legend scattered within these works.\(^77\) Scholars have recognised the larger significances of these moments in the material, interrogating the sources to find an increased awareness of the fictionality inherent in any storytelling through language, and

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\(^76\) C. S. Watkins has recently investigated notions of the supernatural as found in many of these historiographical sources in his *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England*. For approaches to some of these texts see, Nancy Partner, *Serious Entertainments: The Writing of History in Twelfth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977). Robert Bartlett explores both the mentality of Gerald of Wales and his context in his *Gerald of Wales, 1146-1223* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

\(^77\) The Green Children or the toad in the rock are both celebrated moments in William’s *Historia* (I. 27 and I. 28). Two children with green skin emerge from a hole in East Anglia and appear to originate from another world entirely. William attempts to find a meaning behind the event, but at length admits it has defeated him. The toad, on the other hand, he does venture to explain. Stoneworkers open a strange rock to find a toad with a golden chain around its neck. The bishop orders it resealed and thrown back. Ultimately, William concludes that this is an example of a portentous event confected by demons to confound men uselessly seeking its explanation. The trope of a woman of ambiguous identity (human, demon, “fae”) who interacts with a man who must somehow discern her true identity appears frequently in many of these texts. For example, the first instance of the Melusine Legend is often identified as Gervase, *Otia*, I.15. He repeats the trope with different conclusions and shading multiple times (III.40, and III.86). Walter Map explores the trope as well, *De nugis*, 4.9, and also arguably 2.12, 4.8, and 4.11.
especially the ways that the recording of supernatural events serves as a prime locus for reflection on difficulties found in communication, interpretation and the elusive nature of truth.\textsuperscript{78}

These collections of visions, miracles, and wonders played an important role in the transformation of storytelling during the period. Stories and storytelling, like those found in these miracle and wonder collections, found new respectability and prominence, emigrating en-masse from the monastic world into that of the courts and the schools. In numbers never before seen, collections of tales with little overt order or interpretive structure proliferated. Part and parcel of the new attention to story was an important diversion of responsibility. The interpretation and application of individual stories themselves now rested primarily with the audience, not the author. In this literary turn, the author becomes, as Walter Map professes, “a huntsman” bringing the materials to the reader who will serve them as he sees fit.\textsuperscript{79} This shift of responsibility proved to be a literary innovation and has been termed “the emancipation of story.”\textsuperscript{80} This release proved a prerequisite for the rise and prominence of the literary exemplum that so characterizes the sermon literature of the thirteenth century.

The broad picture of writing about the supernatural that emerges in years around the composition of the \textit{Liber revelationum} reveals a wide-spread and multivalent interest in the supernatural but also prominently features a number of apprehensions. We have seen how visions, miracles, and wonders could both respond to doubt and themselves present occasions for doubt. These phenomena carried messages, but these were messages that increasingly asked more of their audience in order to be profitably identified and received. What we have charted

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\begin{enumerate}
\item Walter Map, \textit{De nugis curialium}, 2.32. Shepherd cites this passage as a key example of the interpretive shift he describes, “The Emancipation of Story,” 57.
\end{enumerate}
amounts to a broad area for interpretation and discernment in human interactions with the Other World, its denizens and its powers, and we can now turn to Peter of Cornwall’s Liber revelationum itself and a description of some of the texts tracing these interactions with the beyond that it contains.

Section 3: The Liber revelationum

The Book of Revelations itself is a fascinating artifact. Its size and its contents defy any attempt at a quick and easy description. A full treatment of the text’s contents with codicological information can be found in Sharpe and Easting’s Peter of Cornwall’s Book of Revelations.\textsuperscript{81} For our purposes here, I will aim to provide a basic introduction to the shape and contents of the manuscript that will serve as a foundation for the literary and historical discussions to follow. First, I will provide a rough description of the book as a physical object and the main ideas behind its major division into two parts. Next, I will outline the general categories that can be used to describe its contents. Following the discussion of its contents’ categorization, I will briefly explore the composition and reading methods revealed by the book’s contents and their organization. Finally, I will focus the discussion clearly on the first book of the compilation, highlighting the most relevant issues surrounding its sources and organization that will prove indispensable for the discussions to follow.

The book of revelations today survives in one copy, apparently the autograph, in the library of Lambeth Palace. Unlike all of Peter’s other surviving works, it does not have a dedicatee. Sharpe has suggested that it may be a working copy, the step before a presentation edition, which was either never made or has been long lost.\textsuperscript{82} The work does have notes

\textsuperscript{81} Sharpe and Easting, 342-52.
\textsuperscript{82} Sharpe and Easting, 14.
apparently in Peter’s own hand, and the numerous revisions and interventions by a correcting hand and authorial voice support the idea of a working copy. The entire manuscript is over 462 folios long and in both books taken together there are some 1,076 individual chapters. The first book occupies folios 1-127 and has 193 extant chapters, while the second takes up folios 128-462 and is divided into 883 extant chapters.83

The major organizational feature of the work is its division into two parts. In both parts, Peter explains that he will include only miracles that have occurred since Christ’s passion, and that are not found in either the New or Old Testaments. Biblical revelations are already widely available, and Peter aims to make the scattered corpus of post-biblical revelations immediately available (presto) to an interested reader. The first book contains “those revelations which pertain to the glory of the celestial life or the eternal or transitory pains” in the hereafter. The second holds “all other revelations.”84 Peter then explains some of the organizational pitfalls that result from this division. A reader will not find all of the revelations pertaining to an individual saint in one place, nor will he find all the material from one source together. Furthermore, the material will not be neatly divided based upon the subject revealed: such as souls, God, dead men, or other invisible things. Instead, the order awaiting the reader is that in which Peter found the material in his reading, sorted based upon whether it pertained on the one hand “to glory or torment,” or to something else spiritual on the other.

Peter collected his materials from what he had available around him. I divide this material into three broad types: “longer” works or major visions that traveled independently,
selections drawn from other collections of various kinds, and stories he heard orally. The longest works include: the *Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii*, the *Vision of the Monk of Eynsham*, the *Vision of Gunthelm*, the *Vita prima* and *Vita secunda* of St. Bernard, and the Vita of Godric of Finchale among others. The works excerpted from other collections originate from a number of collection types. We have borrowings from famous collections like Gregory’s *Dialogues*, Bede’s *Historia*, the *Vitae patrum*, and the *Miracles of the Virgin*. Others were apparently collections of saints’ lives or legendaries. Peter’s oral materials, some of the most interesting in the collection, originated from his administrative, familial, and social contacts. Peter was the author of these stories, and by recording them in his book he raised them into the company of the oldest and most venerable Christian literature on the miraculous. This elevation, or rather integration, of local tradition and the more universal literary tradition neatly encapsulates the kinds of interactions between orality and literacy often found in the twelfth century.85

True to his word, the order found in the manuscript is the order of his reading; but every project has a starting place, and for Peter this origin point is really the collection of longer visions found at the beginning of the first book.86 These were the texts Peter had in mind when he began his project, and the texts that follow them in the *Book of Revelations* represent the directions his reading took after he had recorded this main group. These first works are transcribed in their entirety, unlike the rest of the texts Peter worked from. The first work after the prologue is the *Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii*, followed by a unique variant version of the same story. Third, we find the *Visions of Ailsi and his Sons*, a collection of miracles

86 Sharpe and Easting discuss the ordering and copying of the *Book of Revelations* in detail: *Peter of Cornwall’s Book of Revelations*, 342-53. The order of the text is the same as in Peter’s day, based both on the chapter numbers in the text and on the quire signatures. The suggestion made by James regarding missing material appears to be misplaced. Instead, irregular quires where the work of different scribes came together appear more likely (345).
witnessed by Peter’s family and one great vision experienced by Peter’s grandfather. Fourth comes the Vision of Gunthelm. After a couple short additions, we find the fifth and last of the group, the Vision of the Monk of Eynsham. It is fair to call these five longer “independent” sources an important part of Peter’s impetus, and I believe the entire collection needs to be read in the light of the themes Peter explicitly raises in the prologue as well as those themes found in this first group. A preliminary exploration of these important elements will follow in the description of the contents of the first book itself, after the general outline of Peter’s different source types is complete.

Beyond these initial five texts, the ways Peter read and excerpted his sources follow his introductory promises regarding content and organization very closely. He made use of a good number of single works that could have traveled in independent volumes, as well as existing collections of tales that came into his hands. Of these, the Life of Godric of Finchale and the Dialogues of Gregory the Great provided the deepest continuous wells of material that we can reliably trace; however, a reader will find significant parts of Bede’s Historia as well as a number of other groupings of sources that apparently traveled in individual volumes. In these cases, Peter follows the order of the source, sorting material into either Book I or Book II as its subject demanded, often rewriting the beginning of a selection to some extent to provide context. What results is a topical abbreviation of the original. This treatment describes his approach to the majority of the items present in the manuscript.

A large amount of what appear to be excerpts from individual saints’ lives likely reached Peter in the form of collections as well. M. R. James, when he first catalogued the manuscript,

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87 Sharpe and Easting provide an example of such rewriting, in the lead up to an excerpt from the Vita of Godric of Finchale (LR 1.82; covers Vita 11.30-12.34). Peter of Cornwall’s Book of Revelations, 355-56.
noted that a considerable number of its items appear to “roughly” follow the liturgical calendar.\footnote{M. R. James, \textit{A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of Lambeth Palace} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), 83.} Indeed, entire strings of saints days do in fact line up, with orderings starting and stopping seemingly with little reason or consistency. For example, chapters twenty-nine through thirty-five of Book One are all January feasts and mostly in order. Chapter thirty-six is in January but not in order. After thirty-six the order breaks down, jumping to March and then to August and then March again.\footnote{1.29 St. Julian (Jan 9), 1.30 St. Remy (Jan 13), 1.31 St. Maur, 1.33 St. Agnes, 1.34 St. Fructuosus (Jan 21), 1.35 St. Odilo (Jan 19), 1.37 St. Winwalocus (March 3), 1.38 St. Radegund (Aug 11), 1.39 Perpetua (March 7) 2.18-21 St. Basil (Jan 1), 2.22 St. Martina (Jan 1), 2.23-24 St. Genevieve (Jan 3), 2.25 St. Lucian (Jan 7), 2.26-32 St. Julian and Basilissa (Jan 9 and Jan 6), 2.33 St Hilary (Jan 13), 2.34 St. Remy (Jan 13). The correspondence continues in order to Odilo.} I suspect that what lies behind this tendency in the manuscript are individual legendaries or collections of saints’ lives, organized by feast day, acting as Peter’s sources. He would have read and excerpted them in the same manner he did sources like Gregory’s \textit{Dialogues}. The seemingly inexplicable breaks and inconsistencies in the orderings could then be explained by the change to a different volume. Further supporting this suspicion are variations found in the relationship between the two books.\footnote{For example, the January string of saints cited above expands considerably if fit into the saints found in the early chapters of Book Two. 2.18-21 St. Basil (Jan 1), 2.22 St. Martina (Jan 1), 2.23-24 St. Genevieve (Jan 3), 2.25 St. Lucian (Jan 7), 2.26-32 St. Julian and Basilissa (Jan 9 and Jan 6), 2.33 St Hilary (Jan 13), 2.34 St. Remy (Jan 13). The correspondence continues in order to Odilo.} Namely, in a number of places, the order in which consistent groups of saints appear is inverted.\footnote{For example, in Book I the order is: Godric, Life of Gregory, \textit{Dialogues} of Gregory the Great. In Book II, this order is inverted.} This inversion would be consistent with stacking individual volumes after copying material into Book I, and then beginning the excerpts for Book II at the top of the stack.

Peter’s oral materials tend to appear in groups. These groups, just as for the excerpts he took from written works, often reveal identical or closely related sources. For example, the Cistercian monks of Stratford Langthorne provided Peter with a string of stories in Book I as well as in Book II, sorted by subject matter. Likewise, contacts with the area of Lesnes provide material found in both books. What is most striking is that there is no attempt made to excuse the
inclusion of tales heard from reliable acquaintances right beside the accounts of venerable saints. Instead, these stories appear as “living” examples of the continuing and timeless truths revealed by the whole, further extending an observation found in the Dialogues of Gregory the Great that miracles are still happening in our time.\footnote{LR 1.130 (101va); Dialogues, 4.43.2. Indeed, the number is even increasing as the end nears (Romans 13:11-12).}

Section 4: The Liber revelationum, Book I

Following this brief introduction to the manuscript as a whole, we can now turn our attention to the first book, which is the primary focus of this study. The first book, dealing with the joys and the pains found in the hereafter, consists of roughly the first 127 folios of the manuscript and contains 193 extant chapters. A full break-down of its contents can be found in the first appendix. This section will focus on providing a very brief introduction to some of the major structural elements of this first section as well as an equally brief background to some of its major contents. The book begins with the prologue to the entire work, which itself consists of excerpts from a number of important texts. The contents themselves begin with the string of five major visions discussed above. Following these are literally scores of excerpts from saints’ lives and other major sources available to Peter. Finally, the book ends with a group of oral stories gathered from the monks of Stratford Langthorne, Abbot Benedict of Coggeshall, and the parish priest of Lesnes.

Within all these sections, there are a number of works that Peter authored. In the prologue, Peter records a veridical dream he had been told by a layman. One of the five major visions that begin the book is in fact a story from Peter’s grandfather, Ailsi. Breaking the order somewhat, this vision is accompanied by other materials from Peter’s family that do not strictly
pertain to the rewards or punishments awaiting souls in the hereafter. Following the big five, Peter recounts two stories apparently drawn from anonymous oral sources, connected by their inclusion of bad priests and ravens. Finally, the group of oral stories that end the book all, of course, have Peter as their author.

The prologue to Book I begins with the introductory words cited above in the introduction to this study, before proceeding to borrowings from a special selection of authorities. In the course of the prologue, Peter weaves these important texts together in order to set the stage of his collection. Appropriately, he starts with the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great, beginning at the opening of book IV. Augustine’s “Letter 159” follows Gregory the Great. Immediately after Augustine, Peter includes his “Dream of John of Orpington,” a gentleman acquaintance, before resuming Gregory’s *Dialogues* where he left off. A major portion of Augustine’s *De cura pro mortuis gerenda* closes the prologue. In the following chapter, I will examine how the prologue develops issues of access to the unseen world as well as doubts regarding both its existence and also human access to it through the words of its authorities.

After this rather lengthy introduction, Peter presents the first items of his collection proper: the string of five large visions. These stories prominently feature doubts and various scepticisms as well as wrestle with epistemological questions and uncertainties. Indeed, some of these stories play a prominent role in the developments in human interaction with the beyond discussed above, particularly the development of Purgatory and the tensions between literal or figurative interpretation. These elements will be explored in other chapters. For the present, I will aim to provide an introduction to the texts’ composition, diffusion, and dating.
Peter’s first text, the *Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii* openly deals with issues surrounding doubt and visionary epistemology and was immensely popular. Written between 1179 and 1181 by a Cistercian monk, it recounts the descent of the knight Owein into Purgatory through a cave in Ireland. The work was disseminated very widely and was almost immediately translated into a number of vernaculars, most notably French at the hands of Marie de France. Today, it exists in over 150 Latin manuscripts and at least as many manuscripts of its vernacular translations, and these sheer numbers testify to a very great popularity. Versions of it appeared in the *Flowers of History* of Roger of Wendover, the *Chronica maiora* of Matthew Paris and the *Speculum historiale* of Vincent of Beauvais, among many other places. Jacques le Goff claimed that the fully-developed notion of Purgatory as a third distinct place, alongside Hell and Heaven finally took form on its pages, but as I will argue below the text should rather be seen as an especially important moment in the evolution of attitudes regarding purgation rather than an unprecedented innovation.

Tied up with the text’s contemporary popularity and its historical significance is the unusual mode in which the visionary, the knight Owein, claims to have experienced Purgatory. Unlike other visionaries who travel in the spirit, Owein claims to have “seen these things with

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97 Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, 200-201. For evolution, see chapter three.
his own bodily eyes” and “endured the torments in the flesh,” a claim that appears to have sometimes invited disbelief as well as increased wonder.\textsuperscript{98} This insistence on a wide-awake and embodied visionary is highly unusual, and would appear to question basic elements of traditional visionary experience, as I will explore in later chapters.\textsuperscript{99} The peculiarity of this vision probably contributed to its wide popularity, and Peter almost certainly chose to place it in such a prominent place because it spoke to the themes and issues he wished to address.

The second large vision is an alternate account of St. Patrick’s Purgatory that is found only in this manuscript.\textsuperscript{100} Peter recounts how Abbot Bricius of St. Patrick’s Monastery in Ireland told him the story when he passed through London on his way home from the Cistercian General Chapter. This meeting probably took place late October or November of the year 1200.\textsuperscript{101} The story is important for the history of the Purgatory itself, and it seems closer to native Irish traditions than the \textit{Tractatus}.\textsuperscript{102} Unfortunately, neither the Abbot Bricius nor his monastery can be definitively identified.

The next chapter of the \textit{Book of Revelations} is devoted to Peter’s account of \textit{The Visions of Ailsi and his Sons}.\textsuperscript{103} Here, in addition to one longer vision of the Other World, Peter recounts a number of stories regarding supernatural events involving his family. Some of these tales do

\textsuperscript{98} \textit{Tractatus}, 150, ll 1097-1106. “‘Sunt quidam’, inquit, ‘qui dicunt quod aulam intrantes primo fiunt in extasi et hec omnia in spiritu uidere. Quod omnino sibi miles ita contigisse contradictic, sed corporeis oculis se uidisse et corporaliter hec pertulisse constantissime testatur’”.

\textsuperscript{99} Unlike most Christian visions, Owein’s story is really a katabasis, or physical descent into the Other World. For the history of this category, see Daniel Ogden, \textit{Greek and Roman Necromancy} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). For ways in which medieval authors viewed wakeful vision as potentially more reliable, see Schmitt, \textit{Ghosts in the Middle Ages}, 8 and 42.

\textsuperscript{100} Editions of this text can be found in Robert Easting, “Peter of Cornwall’s Account of St. Patrick’s Purgatory,” \textit{Analecta Bollandiana} 97 (1979): 397-416. The text along with an English translation appears in Richard Sharpe and Robert Easting, \textit{Peter of Cornwall’s Book of Revelations}, 130-41.

\textsuperscript{101} Sharpe and Easting, 118.

\textsuperscript{102} Sharpe and Easting, 125.

\textsuperscript{103} Editions of this group of stories can be found in Sharpe and Easting, “Peter of Cornwall. The Visions of Ailsi and His Sons,” \textit{Mediaevistik} 1 (1988): 206-262; Sharpe and Easting, \textit{Peter of Cornwall’s Book of Revelations}, 186-215.
not respect the subject divisions he had laid out for the two books of the compilation, involving revelations that do not concern life after death. In this one place, Peter’s impulse to group stories by their origin overcomes his concern with their subject matter. The stories involve Peter’s grandfather, Ailsi, as well as Jordan, his father, and his uncles Bernard and Nicholas. The vision of the Other World recounts an experience of Ailsi following the death of his youngest son, named Paganus because, as Peter tells us, he had not been baptised until the age of twelve. Pagan dies soon after his baptism, and Ailsi is thrown into great anxiety and doubt regarding the hereafter. This doubt is relieved by a vision in which he tours the Other World with Pagan as his guide.

The *Vision of Gunthelm* is the fourth text included in the main body of Peter’s book, and contains a number of the attributes already established by its predecessors. The *Vision of Gunthelm* is older than the other long visions included in Peter’s compilation, but it too found a large audience, particularly in monastic circles. Likely composed by Peter the Venerable, an abridged version appears in the chronicle of Helinand of Froidmont and the *Speculum* of Vincent of Beauvais. Despite its reputed author, the text’s reception and maybe even the original events it describes betray Cistercian involvement, as the prominent role given to Mary reflects. The text appears in a number of miracle collections, and Mariale manuscripts, some of which, as we will see, are linked textually to other sources that Peter utilized.

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104 It is very unlikely that Peter’s uncle really remained unbaptized until the age of twelve, and his name was, in fact, a completely acceptable Christian name. Peter, nonetheless, believed this etymology for his uncle’s name. See discussion in Chapter Four for details.
106 Constable even entertains the possibility that the vision occurred at Rievaulx under Aelred, “The Vision of Gunthelm,” 103-4.
107 Among these manuscripts a good example is BN 17491, which contains a large number of the same Miracles of the Virgin that Peter copied, as well as the Vision of Gunthelm along with other items.
The last of the initial five is the *Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham*. The vision enjoyed considerable popularity, and there are signs that Peter’s social circle was particularly close to individuals involved with the events behind the text. This vision also brought with it significant controversy. It survives today in thirty-three manuscript copies.¹⁰⁸ The experience of the monk, Edmund, recorded in 1196-97 by his brother Adam of Eynsham made its way to Peter by 1200 and also found its way, in shortened form, into Roger of Wendover, Matthew Paris, and the *Chronicon Anglicanum* of Ralph of Coggeshall.¹⁰⁹

The *Visio monachi de Eynsham* provided a number of contemporaries, including Peter, with an occasion for doubt, and at one point Peter disbelieved the story’s veracity to such an extent that he crossed out every page. The text itself references members of the community who did not believe Edmund’s story, and it is reasonably certain that doubts such as those entertained by this group were what made Peter question the vision’s truth.¹¹⁰ The *Vision of the Monk of Eynsham* is the single longest text in the first book of the compilation and the decision to delete it after it had been fully copied out could not have been made lightly. Peter’s scepticism toward the story was not final: he later reversed his decision, and in a new rubric instructed the reader to ignore his deletion marks.¹¹¹ This choice, like his earlier doubt, was influenced by men with whom he discussed the vision.

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¹¹⁰ In particular the final chapter contains strong words for skeptics, “Dicant, si velint, fictam aegritudinem, cuius rationem omnis medicorum disciplina nescivit! Mentiantur, si impudentiores sunt, tantam hominis fuisse pervicaciam, ut simulate eius dormitio sit...” “Let them call it a false illness if they want whose explanation all the training of the doctors did not know! If they are even more daring, let them lie [saying that] his perversity was so great that his sleep was feigned...” P. Michael Huber, “Visio Monachi de Eynsham,” cap. 58, 731.

¹¹¹ LR, 1.10 (32va). Peter writes, “I, Peter, canceled this vision in this book, thinking that it could not be true, but afterwards it was proven to be most true by true witnesses and those who knew the matter.” “Hanc
After these initial five, Peter takes considerable amounts of text from a number of sources in the course of the rest of the first book. Some of this material follows the calendar in the fashion described above, while other selections, most often those from longer works, do not. Some of the more prominent sources include saints’ lives, legendaries, Bede’s *Historia*, Gregory’s *Dialogues*, the lives of Bernard, the *Vitae Patrum*, and the *Miracles of the Virgin*. Of particular interest are his borrowings from Reginald of Durham’s *Life of Godric of Finchale*.\(^\text{112}\) Godric of Finchale was a merchant and sailor, cited by Henri Pirenne as an example of the twelfth-century, mercantile “nouveaux riches,” who later turned pilgrim and hermit.\(^\text{113}\) He died in the year 1170. For the last twenty or so years of his life he was associated with the Benedictine monastery of Durham, but he also enjoyed close contact with other religious, particularly Aelred of Rievaulx. In life, his holiness attracted the attention of a list of kings and magnates as well as of the local people.\(^\text{114}\) Reginald of Durham took up the task of writing his life while Godric was still alive at the prompting of Aelred, and as one of Godric’s caretakers collected material from the saint himself. After his death, miracles occurred at his tomb and he proved to be a favorite of various monastic groups, especially the Cistercians, who after all had been heavily involved in the composition of his vita. Reginald probably completed writing his life around 1177 and it now exists in only one complete copy. Peter’s excerpts provide a valuable second exemplar.\(^\text{115}\)

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\(^\text{112}\) The only edition of the text is J. Stevenson, ed. *Libellus de vita et miraculis S. Godrici, heremita de Finchale*, Surtees Society 20 (1847).


\(^\text{115}\) Bodl. MS Laud Misc. 413. Sharpe and Easting, 64.
Peter’s oral stories and their sources constitute some of the most interesting material in Book I. These stories provide a picture of the personal contacts through which stories and storytelling about the visionary traveled. They are also remarkable for the detail they provide regarding the specific people and places mentioned in them. In addition to the *Dream of John of Orpington* recounted in the prologue, Peter’s version of *St. Patrick’s Purgatory*, and Peter’s *Visions of Ailsi and his Sons*, the first book contains a fair amount of oral material regarding the joys and pains of the hereafter. Early in the book, chapters twenty-two and twenty-three appear to originate from stories Peter heard. Twenty-two recounts the story of the bad priest Martin of the parochial chapel of All Hallows on the Cellars. In it, Martin refuses to respond to an evening plea from the wife of a Roger Bat. The woman later hangs herself in despair, and the sorrowful priest’s negligence returns to haunt him in the form of an unkindness of ravens that appears at the moment of his death, symbolizing his damnation. This story constitutes the first written account of this London parish. In addition, the Bats were a major medieval London family and their appearance here is a fascinating glimpse into an important London dynasty. Roger Bat, in fact, appears in the cartulary of Holy Trinity within the span of 1170-97, the time of Peter’s predecessor. The next chapter, twenty-three, follows the main elements of Martin’s

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116 The church called All Hallows on the Cellars, or All Hallows the Less, stood on Upper Thames Street. The Third Edition of the *London Encyclopaedia* claims the church is first attested in 1216, 18-19. In John Stow’s survey, the church is attached to a large house called Cold Harbor, *Survey of London, 1598 and 1603*, C. L. Kingsford, ed. vol 1, (Oxford, 1971), 235-37. William Page suggests that this church is a good example of “the manorial and more modern type of parish church built by the lord of the manor or soke adjoining to his house” which followed the subinfeudations of the conquest period. If he has a source other than Stow for this suggestion, he does not cite it; *London: Its Origin and Early Development* (London: Constable & Company, 1923), 162-63. The church burned in the Great Fire of 1666 and was not rebuilt. See Gordon Huelin, *Vanished Churches of the City of London* (London: Guildhall Library Publications, 1996), 3. Holy Trinity had no property or quit rents in the parish of All Hallows the Less. Gerald A. J. Hodgett, *The Cartulary of Holy Trinity Aldgate*, xvi.

117 Gwyn A. Williams, *Medieval London: From Commune to Capital* (University of London: Athlone Press, 1963), 74-75. Williams identifies the Bats as one of the sixteen major interlocking families that provided 70 percent of the aldermen who held office in the city of London before the civil war.

119 The mention of Roger Bat himself occurs in #726 as the holder of land bordering a grant. This grant itself is undated; however, it is possible to suggest a possible timeframe through the witnesses to the grant: Robert the Chaplain and William the Saltmonger. “Robert the Chaplain” appears as a witness five other times in the
story with the shared involvement of ravens and bad priests. In this case, the soul of a bad priest is seen as a raven, flying into the mouth of a gigantic devil.

The next group of oral stories comes at the end of the book, constituting its last twelve chapters. These stories derive from a number of sources all reflecting Peter’s social and administrative contacts. Most of the contributions come from the Cistercian monks of Stratford Langthorne including Herveus the precentor, a laybrother named Roger, and Abbot Benedict. Abbot Thomas of the Cistercian house of Coggeshall provides one story. Finally, three tales originate from William, the parish priest of Lesnes. The stories originating from the Cistercian house of Stratford Langthorne caught the attention of Christopher Holdsworth, who first published them.\(^\text{120}\) These stories reflect a close familiarity between the monks of this house and Peter of Cornwall, which is not surprising given that Peter was later sent on a mission to Archbishop Stephen Langton along with Abbot Benedict of Stratford.\(^\text{121}\) The tenor of these stories follows closely that found in the *Miracles of the Virgin*, which precedes it in the compilation, and some kind of link between Peter’s access to this text and the oral stories immediately following it in the compilation is likely. Mixed in with these tales are some that originate from places other than Stratford. These stories also follow tropes familiar to a wide range of material, but most notably specific stories found in Herbert of Clairvaux’s *Liber miraculorum* and linked Cistercian manuscripts in the British Library and the Bibliothèque

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\(^\text{121}\) Holdsworth, “Eleven Visions,” 188-89. This failed mission in 1210 was one of the more memorable moments in which Peter entered the political stage.
nationale. Fascinatingly, however, the stories here are connected to specific local personalities and places.

William, the parochial priest of Lesnes, stands out as the most interesting source apart from the monks of Stratford, and these stories clearly reflect real personal ties that Peter possessed and the kinds of stories that traveled through them. All three of the stories originating from William have the same basic plot in which the priest asks a dying man to return and describe his post-mortem state. This priest was almost certainly a real person, and Holy Trinity did indeed have control of the parish church there in Peter’s period as well as other property. The priory also had close contacts, both legal and literary, with the nearby Augustinian Abbey of Lesnes, a daughter house of Holy Trinity. In fact, the prior of this Augustinian “abbey” provided Peter with a story found in the second book. The stories originating from William also mention a Subprior Robert of Holy Trinity, who can be found in the cartulary under the date range 1170-97, the same as that for the bad priest Martin. Similarly, a recluse of Brachings in Hertfordshire (Barking) appears as another witness to one of William’s tales. The land and church there were granted to the priory by King Stephen in 1147-48 for the repose of

122 The “Lesnes stories” in Book I are: Cap. 186, 204, and 206. The priest is named in 204.
123 For the history of Lesnes Abbey, see Alfred W. Clapham, Lesnes Abbey in the Parish of Erith, Kent. Holy Trinity’s holdings in the area appear to have survived the foundation of Lesnes Abbey. Holy Trinity acquired the advowson of the parochial church at Lesnes (now called the parish of Erith) from Richard de Lucy, who had acquired the church and manor of Lesnes during the reign of King Stephen. This gift was later confirmed by Richard’s son, Geoffrey, see Clapham, Lesnes Abbey, 2. Richard also granted land in the region of Lesnes to Holy Trinity. A vicarage was ordained for the church before 1218, M. Reddan, “Priory of Holy Trinity Aldgate,” in Victoria History of London, William Page, ed. Vol. 1 (London: Constable & Co., 1909), 473. See, Cart. Antiq. R.N. 20; Stephen’s confirmation, B. M. Chart. L. F. C. xiv, 6. For the vicarage see, B. M. Chart. L. F. C. xiv, 22. Richard de Lucy founded Lesnes Abbey in 1178. An agreement of 1199, under Peter of Cornwall, concedes some marshland held by the canons of Holy Trinity to the canons of Lesnes for 50 shillings paid quarterly, in which Holy Trinity is called the “matrix ecclesia de Liesnes,” Clapham, Lesnes Abbey, 8. Matters were still in dispute between the two houses in 1298, Clapham, Lesnes Abbey, 13. Lambeth “Register Winchelsea,” p. 181. A sign remains, however, of more constructive and peaceful contacts between the two houses in remnants of the abbey’s library. Among the eight confirmed surviving specimens, one is the Pantheologus of Peter of Cornwall. Oxford, St. John’s College MS, 31.
124 2.897 (460vb). The prior’s name is Mark.
125 Subprior Robert is named in LR 1.204. Cartulary, #931. A “Subprior Robert” appears as a witness to a grant by Prior Stephen to Reginald Tannur.
his children’s souls, who were buried in the Priory Church in London, and some of Peter’s extant charters show his administrative activities there.\textsuperscript{126} Interestingly, the Cistercian element so prominent in most of Peter’s other oral stories occurs in William’s stories as well when he becomes a Cistercian at the end of the third tale. Likewise, Lesnes Abbey is remarkable for the “Cistercian design” of its church, in contrast to that of Holy Trinity itself.\textsuperscript{127} Whatever models these stories follow, they involve people and places Peter knew well, and with which his administrative responsibilities often involved him.

**Conclusion**

The contents of the first book of the *Liber Revelationum* combine a vast array of materials, arising from written and oral sources, detailing occasions in which human beings have experienced what comes after death. In the chapters to follow, I will explore both the ways in which the spiritual is rendered intelligible in this material, as well as the messages it conveys. In both categories, I will seek to tease out the various scepticisms and doubts evident in the stories’ messages and narratives. These elements will be closely related to the major themes and developments outlined in this chapter.

This chapter has set the stage for the discussions to follow, introducing the personality of Peter of Cornwall and his works, as well as relevant aspects of the larger literary context for the *Book of Revelations* and the origins of its contents. In particular, the discussion above establishes Peter of Cornwall’s basic reliability. The specific places and people he mentions in the collection can often be independently verified. These characters and informants help a modern reader place

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\textsuperscript{126} Cartulary #973, and 972. Peter of Cornwall allowed the nuns of St. Leonard’s Stratford to have the tithes owed to them from the priory’s demesne in Brackyng mowed and towed away directly by their own famuli in exchange for a fee. Cartulary, #1020.

\textsuperscript{127} Clapham, *Lesnes Abbey*, 43.
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the origins of this collection in a strikingly specific context, and they testify to Peter’s intention to serve as a truthful reporter of evidence.

I have suggested that Peter’s work takes its impetus from epistemological and heuristic concerns, particularly with rendering the invisible visible. His interest in visionary experiences followed this theme but also engaged with a genre that was itself increasingly preoccupied with epistemological difficulties. These can be seen in concerns regarding the literal or figurative interpretation of visionary accounts, discussions concerning the nature and causation of visionary experiences, as well as the veracity of the claims articulated by them. In the chapters to come, we will see how the materials assembled in the first book of the Liber revelationum contribute to and nuance these major currents present at the time of its composition.

In a number of areas, the turn of the thirteenth century appears as a turning point in the literary genres recording human interactions with the supernatural world, and these changes are reflected in the materials found in the Book of Revelations. Indeed, the very genre of panoramic Latin visions of the hereafter, that defines the largest and most prominent materials in the collection, was itself about to end only a few decades after the work’s composition. While these works would circulate in the future, new accounts like them were no longer written, and they were arguably read differently than in the years of their composition. The Liber revelationum captures a constellation of sources and experiences that would in the years to come rarely appear in a similar shape, and offers the modern reader an opportunity to study, test, and experience aspects of the discourses around human knowledge of life after death on the verge of a pronounced narrowing of access to this knowledge. In the next chapter, I will focus on the ways this access is granted, in short, how the spiritual world is rendered intelligible in the constellation of excerpts and stories Peter provides. In my exploration of the ways this material crosses the
space between the regularly sensible and insensible worlds, I will also pay attention to the other explanatory possibilities that present themselves as part and parcel of this passage.
Chapter 2 – The Delivery of Revelation or Crossing Between Worlds in the *Liber revelationum*

**Introduction**

Peter frames his project as a response to doubt arising from an epistemological problem: human beings cannot normally encounter the spiritual world through the senses and as a result they tend to question the existence of what cannot be seen. The materials Peter collected represent exceptions to this regular state of affairs, which provide proof of the existence of the spiritual world as well as its nature. Following Peter Dinzelbacher’s basic definition for revelation literature from the last chapter, we can call the accounts collected in the *Book of Revelations* messages from God (or his saints and angels). These messages have to somehow reach across the divide created by humanity’s estrangement from the spiritual world. In this chapter, I interrogate the ways these messages are delivered. The chapter focuses on the ways in which the insensible becomes sensible in Peter’s collection; that is, how various beings and signs cross the space between the world of the spirit and the sphere of human knowledge. At first glance, the picture of this process presented in the *Book of Revelations* might seem simple or even crude, relying strongly on basic sensory imagery and descriptions, without much overt theoretical elaboration. Such a reductive reading, however, would fail to do justice to the multiple productive tensions clearly present in the sources.

In this chapter, I hope to present access to the types of revelatory knowledge Peter recorded as a process that called for a constant and productive process of discernment. As suggested earlier, major changes were underway at the turn of the thirteenth century in the literary genres dealing with revelation. These changes stressed multiple possibilities regarding
causation, interpretation, and application. In particular, the genre of panoramic, Latin-language visions of the Other World came to an end after the early thirteenth century. Claude Carrozi has traced this cessation to an increasingly difficult process of discernment between the literal and the figurative. Likewise, similar questions and pressures increasingly centered on visionary accounts, especially regarding the phenomenology of visionary experience itself. The contents of the Book of Revelations demonstrate all of these issues in the shape that they took within the reading of one medieval cleric interested in visions and revelations.

Central to the analysis to follow will be my treatment of the first book of the compilation as a crystalized moment of discourse regarding knowledge of the afterlife. Although Peter’s sources are numerous, originating from different places and eras over the span of almost a thousand years, in both his opinion as well as in the presentation he gives to them, they speak with one voice. We have seen how Peter chose not to organize his materials by period or author, but rather only by whether or not they dealt with the afterlife. The themes and central messages that appear through a reading of the selections included in the Book of Revelations allow a modern eye to follow in the footsteps of a medieval reader perusing the texts and consulting the human contacts available to him. In what follows, I will be primarily interested in what emerges from this medieval source selection as a unit and the picture that it paints of the discourse regarding the supernatural current around the year 1200. This picture remains an idiosyncratic one, following the tendencies and the passions of one man, but its very peculiarities are what lend it its value and its interest.

The following chapter will explore the delivery of revelation in several sections. I will first outline how Peter himself introduces his collection and the epistemological questions his book both poses and answers. From Peter’s own framing of access to revelation as an issue, I
will proceed to the media through which these revelations occur, namely experiences like that of the regular human senses. After outlining the sensory language that constitutes the overwhelming majority of the *Book of Revelations*, the chapter will discuss in detail the specific ways individuals gain access to revelation in the excerpts themselves. The chapter will conclude with an examination of potential ambiguities, doubts, and uncertainties present in the conveyance of revelation within Book I of the *Book of Revelations*.

**Part 1: Peter’s Framing of Access to Revelation**

Peter of Cornwall regards his revelations, above all else, as testaments to the existence of the invisible. Peter takes up precisely this issue in the preface to his collection.¹ In the preface to the *Book of Revelations*, he provides a guide to his ideas regarding the delivery of revelation or the crossing between the spiritual and the sensible worlds. The confluence of texts that Peter constructs in the preface describes human access to the spiritual world as a phenomenon responding to a specific set of needs. These needs involve a number of ambivalences and uncertainties connected to the limitations of human knowledge and ways of knowing. Peter approaches access to revelation through the words of both authorities and also through the experience of his friends, weaving the words of Gregory the Great, Augustine of Hippo, and the country gentleman John of Orpington together to establish the parameters for human knowledge of normally invisible things.

Doubt is the result of an epistemological deficiency resulting from the Fall of Man, and this problem can be addressed in a number of ways, through reason, experiential analogues, and most completely and truly through faith. All of these ways, with the exception of faith, essentially involve a coded kind of communication where what is revealed may not be what it

¹ LR (2vb-9va); Sharpe and Easting, 74-115.
seems. The excerpts Peter chose and arranged interrogate the reliability of storytelling and relate it to the process of faith. They explore dreaming as the closest equivalent to both the means of access to revelation, as well as the experience of the soul after death. Dreaming also captures well the evanescent and uncertain quality of these experiences, leaving constant room for discernment between multiple possibilities, ranging from the revelatory to the mundane.

The work begins with a selection from Book IV of the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great, outlining mankind’s inability to directly and experientially know the spiritual world as one of the consequences of the Fall.² Peter introduces this excerpt by explaining “That spiritual and invisible things are hardly believed by carnal men because they hardly know through experience those things which they hear.”³ Adam enjoyed direct knowledge of the spiritual world, but he and his progeny had lost this access as a result of sin. In the absence of experience all we now possess are stories; stories whose truth it is almost natural to question, since “carnal men, because they are unable to know those invisible things through experience, doubt the existence of what they cannot see with corporeal eyes.”⁴

The rest of the excerpt explores avenues to address this doubt or uncertainty. The first and best route is through faith, and only after a short discussion of it does Gregory explore other responses more dependent upon reason. He explains that experiential knowledge of the invisible world is actually possible even now through the Holy Spirit, but those without a solid grounding in their faith lack this ability. Their route is to place their trust in the words of their elders. Once

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³ LR (2vb); Sharpe and Easting, 78. “Quod eterna et spiritualia et inuisibilia ideo a carnalibus minime credantur, quia ea audiant, per experimentum minime nouerunt.”
⁴ LR (2vb); Gregory, *Dialogues*, IV.1.2. Sharpe and Easting, 78. “sed carnales quique, quia illa inuisibilia scire non ualent per experimentum, dubitant utrumne sit quod corporalibus oculos non uident.”
again, the resort is to stories. An unbeliever, of course, has already found this avenue deficient. In following this objection, Peter makes his first editorial intervention in the text.

Peter introduces the next section which explores reasons for believing in the invisible with the rubric, “By what explanations, examples, and revelations it can be proven that the soul exists and lives after death, and similarly that God, angels, and other invisible things exist.”\(^6\) In what follows, he alters the original dialogue, between Gregory the Great and Peter the Novice, to one between Peter of Cornwall speaking with the voice of Gregory and the reader taking on the words of the student.\(^6\) “Perhaps,” he says “to the aforesaid you who are reading these things will respond….” He then inserts the student’s objection that unbelievers do not look to faith but to reason.\(^7\) Gregory’s dialogue has become a discussion between the persona of Peter of Cornwall and the reader, drawing the reader into the text as an active participant. Peter continues in this vein, engaging with questions that he places in the reader’s mouth, especially dealing with the topic of faith.

Peter enlarges on Gregory’s original argument that all human beings have faith, especially in things we have only been told. Everyone at some point or circumstance believes in something he cannot directly verify through experience, but has simply heard as a story. To Gregory’s example of one’s parentage, he adds the existence of unvisited continents and cities, unseen internal organs, as well as the invisible minds and feelings of others that we assume are like our own.\(^8\) Anyone must concede that some stories are worthy of belief. The question is really whose word we choose to trust.

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\(^5\) LR (3ra); Sharpe and Easting, 80. “Quibus rationibus et exemplis et revelationibus probari possit animam esse et uiuere post mortem. Similiter et Deum et angelos et alia inuisibilia esse.”

\(^6\) The next section is *Dialogues*, IV.1.6-3.2. LR (3ra-3va).

\(^7\) LR (3ra); Sharpe and Easting, 80. “Forte ad predicta tu, qui hec legis, respondebis, Qui esse inuisibilia…” Compare to original, *Dialogues* IV.1.6. “Placet ualde quod dicas. Sed qui esse inuisibilia…”

\(^8\) The elaboration occurs on LR (3rb), added to *Dialogues*, IV. 2.1. For transcription, Sharpe and Easting, 80.
The existence of the soul after death may, however, still strain credulity, because the course of regular experience could be taken to argue against its existence. Unlike the historical account of the presence of Jesus and the apostles, one can observe a dying man for oneself. In this observation, it may be difficult to accept on faith that the soul survives after his death. In life, the movements of the body testify to an unseen force governing it, but these visible testimonies disappear at death.

This observational doubt regarding the soul’s survival can be addressed by logic and experience. The invisible mind that we all possess resembles God and through this resemblance should logically be eternal. This logic still prompts a rebellion from the mind since the soul’s survival cannot be seen. Nonetheless, no one would doubt the existence of his own mind, even though it is invisible. Beyond this evidence, the longevity of the human spirit is evident through another highly visible manifestation: the miracles of the martyrs, worked after their deaths. As the dialogue broaches the topic of miracles and visions, Peter shifts to the words of Augustine, which offer more testimony for the soul’s survival in the form of dreams.

Augustine’s Letter 159, recounts the dream of the physician Gemnadius, who doubted the survival of the soul. As a physician, he doubtless had opportunity to observe the process of bodily death and based upon what he had seen doubted if there was life beyond death. In a dream, Gemnadius is approached by a beautiful youth who explains that even though the physician’s body is seemingly motionless, nonetheless he is experiencing this conversation, and

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9 The reference to Jesus and the apostles is added by Peter, LR (3va). Added to Dialogues, IV.3.2. For transcription, Sharpe and Easting, 82. This interjection covers the omission of Dialogues, IV. 3.3-4.10.
10 Peter, LR (3rb); Sharpe and Easting, 82. “Sed forte de anima hominis dubitas an sit, cum uideri non possit, et dicis...” Peter then picks up with Dialogues IV.5.1-8.
11 Gregory bases his resemblance argument upon the human mind’s need to serve God. He maintains that, “Those who serve ought to bear a resemblance to the one they serve.” He concludes that the angels and the souls of the just are just such servants. The soul in its lowest activity governs the body; in its highest it serves God. To do this service, it needs to be both invisible (like God) and eternal. Dialogues, 4.5.4.
seeing without eyes. So too it is for the dead, who continue to exist and experience apart from their bodies. The experience of dreaming provides an analogue for the survival of the mind after death, one any empiricist should take seriously.

Peter appears to have ultimately drawn this text from the *Prognosticum futuri seculi* of Julian of Toledo, including only part of the letter, cutting out both its beginning and end, and in the process changing its tone considerably. With the first and second paragraphs cut out, Peter misses a reference to the twelfth book of Augustine’s *Literal Meaning of Genesis*, in which the soul’s dream-like existence is further developed along with Augustine’s theory of spiritual vision. This omission may help explain the curious absence of this text in the entire *Book of Revelations* as it outlines Augustine’s theory for human visionary experience. It remains unclear why Peter could not have found this text elsewhere. Likewise, this excerpt excludes the final paragraph of the letter in which Augustine expresses considerable ambivalence regarding how helpful or authoritative Gemnadius’ dream actually is.

Keeping with the theme of dreaming, Peter next introduces the first of his oral sources in the dream of John of Orpington. His point is to demonstrate that the soul has “something of the

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13 I infer Peter’s ultimate dependence upon the *Prognosticum* through nearly identical introductory wordings that differ from Augustine and from the fact that only the part of the letter included in the *Prognosticum* appears. For the shared variant, compare Augustine, *Ep.* 159, 3: “Narrabo autem unum aliquid breuiter, unde cogites frater noster Gennadius, notissimus fere omnibus nobisque carissimus medicus, qui nunc apud Carthaginem degit et Romae suae artis exercitazione praepolluit, ut hominem religiosum nosti atque erga pauperum curam inpigra misericordia facillimoque animo benignissimum, dubitabat tamen aliquando, ut modo nobis rettulit, cum adhuc esset adulescens et in his elemosynis ferventissimus, utrum esset uita post mortem. Huius igitur mentem….” Julian, *Prog.* 2.33: “*Fratrem quemdam gennadium medicum sibi notissimum atque carissimum refert apud carthaginem fuisse, quem erga pauperum curam inpigra misericordia facillimo que animo benignissimum extitisse testatur; qui tamen gennadius dubitabat --- utrum esset uita post mortem. Huius igitur mentem….***” Peter of Cornwall: “*Beatus Augustinus fratrem quendam Gennadium medicum sibi notissimum et carissimum refert apud Cartagine fuisse, quem erga pauperum curam inpigra misericordia facillimoque animo benignissimum exitisse testatur. Qui tamen Gennadius dubitabat uturum esset uita post mortem. Huius igitur mentem….***”

14 Sharpe and Easting have noted this absence and likewise found it hard to explain, 43.

divinity in itself” that is glimpsed through dream experience, especially veridical dreams. This bit of the divinity recalls Gregory’s argument for the soul’s survival based on its resemblance to God. In short, Peter has found independent evidence for Gregory’s argument. In the story, John dreams that he engages in a friendly disagreement with a parish priest regarding the number of pigs in a field. The priest argues that there are ten, and he is thus entitled to one. John maintains that there are nine and is vindicated after a careful count. Upon awaking, John later finds himself in the very same discussion with the priest, and the result he foresaw occurs. By this experience, John learnt that the soul did have “something of the divinity” and that it must survive death.

The discussion of dream-analogues to the soul’s experience concluded, Peter resumes Gregory’s Dialogues where he left them, broaching the topic of spiritual vision. Souls have been seen by many witnesses, but not in the manner of regular sight. Instead, they are witnessed through spiritual vision “purified by acts of faith and abundant prayers.” Such sight depends not on the eyes of the body, but rather the “eyes of the mind.” Here one might anticipate Augustine’s Literal Interpretation of Genesis, but instead Peter introduces a selection from On the Care to be Taken for the Dead.

Peter takes up Augustine’s On the Care to be Taken for the Dead as a guide for the encounters with souls described by Gregory. Peter provides a neat, and literal, summary of the questions addressed in his excerpt. When the dead appear, who actually appears? Is it the dead themselves or just their images? If it is their images, do angels bring it about without the

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16 LR, (4vb), “animam hominis esse, sed et quoddam diuinum et scientiam futuorum in se naturaliter habere....”
17 LR, (5va), “[Johannes] didicit experimento animam quiddam diuinitatis in se habere, per quod eam perpetuo uiuere deinceps firmissime cognouit.”
18 This selection is Dialoges, IV, 6.3-8.
20 LR (5vb), “Sed antequam plenius de usionibus siue reuelationibus, quibus anima siue homo mortuus siue angelus bonus uel malus uidetur, dicamus, quid de huiusmodi usionibus… beatus sentiat Avgustinus....”
knowledge of the dead? If it is the dead, are all apparitions of the dead really who they appear to be? Furthermore, what do the dead know of the living world? If they can know about the living, do all know? If only some know, in what way do they know compared to the others that do not? Finally how is it that some do not appear, while others do?\(^{21}\)

Augustine’s answers to these questions regarding appearances of the dead are authoritative but ambivalent, leaving open many possibilities. When the dead appear it can be only their images, manipulated by angels.\(^{22}\) Augustine appears to favor this solution, but cannot adopt it completely. The dead themselves, however, can return by the command of God. The dead on their own do not know what transpires in this world, but they can learn about current events from both the newly dead and angels.\(^{23}\) After all, martyrs are seen to respond to the petitions of the living. In all of these possibilities, the apparition appears the same. It may or may not be who it appears. When the dead interact with the living an ambiguity seems always present.

There are some clear limitations placed upon the abilities of the deceased. They cannot choose to return to the living by their own will. Similarly, they do not know by their nature alone current or future events. Augustine’s argument is that if the gates between worlds were wide open, any loving parent would return if they could and the living would be swarmed with spirits.\(^{24}\) Likewise, knowledge among the dead still must be communicated, through conversation or divine enlightenment. These two conditions imply that if the “dead” appear to tell us something, it is because God wishes something to be communicated or made known. The will and abilities of the dead themselves are incidental.

\(^{21}\) LR (5vb). For transcription see, Sharpe and Easting, 94.
\(^{22}\) LR (6vb); Augustine, De cura, 15-16.
\(^{23}\) LR (8ra); Augustine, De cura, 18.
\(^{24}\) In particular, his mother would doubtless have visited him. De cura, 16. LR (6vb-7ra).
As the last words in Peter’s prologue, this section of Augustine’s *On the Care to be Taken for the Dead* paints a complex picture. What appears may be only a fiction, designed like a work of literature to convey a message or idea, or it may be almost what it appears. In all the tales to follow, the reader can remember that the sons who speak to their fathers, the old friends seen in bliss or torment, may be only angelic actors playing a role or literally only images flashed on the screen of the mind. The prologue has established some parameters for the stories to follow, but it has also highlighted the “doubleness” of their contents. This tension, which far from being simply problematic will become highly productive, will prove to be just one of many such tensions centering around the conveyance of revelation in Peter’s materials.

Peter’s prologue orients the reader for the rest of the collection by establishing its contents as a response to doubt arising from human epistemological limitations. We doubt what we cannot see, and this disbelief appears particularly strong for the existence of the soul after death. We can respond to this doubt through logical arguments, the phenomenon of dreaming in which we mentally experience with our body dormant, and the miracles and appearances of the martyrs and other select individuals. The appearances of the special or selected dead, as we have seen, raise a number of logistical and logical issues. In particular, they raise the possibility of a division between image and reality, edificatory theatre and actual event. Finally, running throughout all components of the prologue lies the experience of storytelling. Stories will form the real avenue of revelation found in the collection, and most of the responses to doubt explored in the prologue take the form of stories or are bolstered by them. The need and justification for

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25 This “doubleness” is very similar to that identified by Kruger in his study of medieval dreaming. I use it here to refer to aspects of general visionary experience. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, esp. chapter two, “The Doubleness and Middleness of Dreams,” 17-34. For the ambiguities in Augustine’s *De cura* and their relation to the larger genre of dreams’ reliability, see 39-40.
believing in stories from certain sources are paramount in the prologue, and it is just these kinds of stories that Peter believes will follow.

**Part 2: The Language of the Experiences: Sensory Descriptions**

Before any consideration of the specific ways individuals gain access to knowledge about the spiritual world, I will pause to consider the very nature of the descriptions that convey this knowledge. The language of the revelations Peter collected for his book is that of sensory experience. This method is the only one open to human beings after sin, as described in the prologue. Human beings have largely lost the ability for direct knowledge of spiritual realities, but the human sensory perception of the corporeal world is still intact. As a result, visionaries see and hear angels, visit celestial cities and frightening caverns, and see and experience tortures and joys similar to those of the regular world. These revelations are recognizable in their similarity to the things of everyday life, as known through the senses.

A good idea of the centrality of sensory imagery and descriptions can be gleaned from Peter’s rubrics. These rubrics provide an important clue to the ways Peter read his sources. For almost every item found in the collection, he provides introductory rubrics, of varying length, summarizing essential elements of the plot found in each. I will utilize these rubrics as important summaries, which allow us to gauge what aspects of a particular piece Peter found most essential. In this section, I will be concerned primarily with the sensory language Peter chooses to describe the experiences he records. While the ultimate object of knowledge may surpass the ability of the senses to convey, Peter himself in the collection does not stress this fact. He stresses, in contrast, the basic sensory nature of his stories.

Seeing and hearing make up almost the entirety of Peter’s descriptions for the collection. The most prominent elements in the majority of the rubrics are the basic sensory verbs such as
video, “see,” and audio, “hear.” To these I would add verbs that imply in their meaning seeing, hearing, feeling, and the retelling of experiences to others like appareo, “appear,” narro, “tell,” and dico, “say” or “tell.” These five verbs alone bear the main weight of Peter’s rubrics. In the course of some 194 rubrics in Book I, some form of video appears at least 107 times. Some form of the verb appareo which logically implies an act of seeing, appears at least 33 times. Similarly, some form of ostendo, “show,” appears at least five times. Beyond sight, at least 24 instances of audio occur, a much smaller but still impressive number. To these, uses of the verbs narro, “tell” (19) and dico (37) should be added. The use of these verbs also bears interesting situational contexts, which will be explored in detail below. Remarkably, the verb revelo, “reveal,” occurs only once to describe an excerpt from the Vita prima of St. Bernard.

The roughly fifty-six occurrences of narro and dico can denote something being told or explained to the visionary as well as the visionary passing on what they have experienced. For example, St. Benedict appears and then explains to a sacristan that he was unable to attend matins on his feast day as he was busy elsewhere, but foretells that he will be present the next day. Before the “Tribunal of the Lord,” Jerome is called a Ciceronian rather than a Christian. Godric of Finchale is an avid storyteller, often describing the departure of souls and even the appearance of the gate through which they pass. These moments of specified narrativity are

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26 LR 1.65 (79rb); Geoffrey of Clairvaux, Vita Prima S. Bernardi, IV 21. PL 185: 333. “Qualiter Bernardo celebranti missam pro anima malachie episcopi dominus reueluit animam eius glorificatam iam fuisse. Vnde iam sacrificio expleto formam mutauit orationis, et orationem que solet dici pro defunctis dimittens, orationem que solet in sollemnitate pontificum dici, subintulit.”

27 LR 1.53 (76ra); AB vol 7(? Or 6) p. 258-261 “Appendix ad cod. 8873-78. De S. Benedicto”. “Qualiter sanctus Benedictus cum Placido pueru apparuit christiano edituo monasterii Floriacensis, dicens se non fuisse ea nocte ad matutinas monachorum in sua festiuitate, ea quod ea nocte intentus erat in alia regione circa ereptionem anime cuyusdam monachi de manu diaboli, qui eum in multis accusauit. Sed in crastino se futurum ad missam fratrem prexidit. Quod et impleuit.”

28 LR 1.55 (76vb); Jerome, Epistola, ed. I. Hilberg, CSEL 54 (1996), 22, 29. Peter’s rubric: “Qualiter beatus Jeronimus infeirmitate corrupus raptus est ante tribunal Domini ubi salutiferu uerbere castigatus est ne Tullium aud seculares libros de cicero legeret. Vnde ab eo qui presidebat Ciceronianus dictus est non Christians.”

29 LR 1.86 (87ra); Reginald of Durham, Vita S. Godrici, 95, 195. Peter’s Rubric: “Qualiter Godricus sepe uiderit et dixerit quod anime tam bonorum quasi malorum de corpore exeuntium rapiantur in aere ibi exspectantes
interesting both for the way that they sit side-by-side with events described purely in experiential
terms, as well as for how they remind us that all of the revelations pass through the conduit of
another’s experience. Everything in the collection was at some point told to someone.

A perusal of the collection’s rubrics establishes the primacy of basic sensory descriptions
and reminds the reader that these are delivered at second-hand; however, as the reader has been
warned in the preface, these sensory images and sensations bear an air of artificiality. These
experiences utilize the eyes of the mind rather than the eyes of the body, and so do not arise from
contact with material realities. Although the sights, sounds, and sensations visionaries report are
like those experienced in the course of normal life, they are a symbolic language. Just as
revelations pass through the medium of story, the sensory descriptions that constitute them are
themselves a medium to convey something that is beyond description. A more detailed
exploration of the difficulties and opportunities this situation presents will follow in the next
chapter, dealing with what Peter’s revelations actually reveal. For now, I would like to stress that
the accounts collected in the Book of Revelations use a sensory language, that functions as a
proof of the reality of the normally unknowable by the fact that it is apprehended in sensory
terms, while at the same time often suggesting that what is actually apprehended is only a
shadow cast by something else. A tension between the proof value of the literal, and the
“doubleness” or “artificiality” of the figurative is everywhere inherent.

**Part 3: Access to Revelation in the Stories Themselves**

As I have already stressed, the common avenue through which all of the revelations pass
is that of the story. All of these moments are mediated at some point through a narrative account.

*quid de illis iubeat dominus. Dixitque ibi portam esse ferream et angustam, a bonis et malis angelis circumuallatam,
bonis uidelict angelis bonorum animas per eam secum deferentibus, malis autem angelis malorum animas in penis
sibi debitas deorsum traheuntium.*
These experiences occurred to others and we only know of them because the experience was shared, making their accounts the real conduit through which knowledge of the Other World passes. The mediated quality of our knowledge of the life to come recalls ideas that Augustine toyed with regarding possible angelic impersonation of the dead, but on a larger and more fundamental scale. Through the medium of language the spirit becomes matter, in both presentation on the written page and also in the method of its description.

In this section, I would like to look past this one great unifying element to explore the specific ways spiritual things become available to human knowledge in the collection. Namely, in the excerpts themselves, what kinds of states and situations allow access to the invisible, and what kinds of individuals do we find as our protagonists? My focus on the exact descriptions of the visionaries’ states and conditions may appear pedantic, but my aim is to establish the kinds of specific situations and descriptive vocabulary that made up Peter’s idea of revelatory experience. In this close analysis, several broad themes or avenues of contact with the spiritual world emerge: the gift of sight or special senses, and knowledge gained from contact of some kind with death. As a final addition, I would like to add the category of dreaming which links these two groups, while partaking in both of them. I will explore these three modes in this order, reserving dreams or dream-like experiences for the last because my discussion of them will draw upon the first two. In making these distinctions, I do not mean to allege that that these three modes are completely separate and unrelated to each other. In fact, similar explanations or assumptions often do lie behind all of them. For my purposes here, however, I believe that their similarities can be best understood through a detailed analysis of the precise ways in which these experiences are described.
Access to Revelation (1): Gift of Sight or Special Senses

In the material that follows, I limit what I call the gift of special senses to phenomena apprehended by a conscious and lucid individual. Those with this particular gift do not have to be rapt out of their regular senses, nor must they encounter spiritual beings and realities in dreams; rather, they can see the normally unknowable within the everyday world. Those with this ability act as a conduit through which knowledge of the Other World passes, and this is how we often encounter them in Peter’s material. In this fashion, they come across as oracles explaining the things the rest of humanity cannot know. As we will see, these moments are different from the majority of the accounts in the Book of Revelations.

The ability to encounter spiritual realities through the senses most often pertains to spiritual athletes, and acts as both a reward for and a confirmation of their sanctity. In the first book of Peter’s compilation, which deals with the life to come, these moments of transcendent perception naturally focus on incidents that reveal something about the fate of the soul after death. Those who have this ability do not gain it at the expense of encountering the spiritual world in other mediums, such as dreams or ecstasies, but rather they add another possibility to their repertoire, and the distinction between these modes can often be fuzzy. Nonetheless, the modern reader can see access to all three possible routes as a sign of a varied and prolonged career as a sacred visionary.

There is no shortage of such individuals in the excerpts from any time period. For example, among the earliest sources we find moments such as when, in the Life of Anthony by Athanasius of Alexandra, Antony, while sitting on a mountain, gazes upward to see a soul entering heaven with a group of rejoicing angels. The saint immediately prays to know the soul’s identity. In response, a voice informs him that the soul is that of the monk Amos, who had
persevered in his sanctity from youth to old age.\textsuperscript{30} In the \textit{Dialogues} of Gregory the Great, St. Benedict, when his eyes linger on the air in his cell while gazing upward, sees the soul of his sister in the shape of a dove entering heaven.\textsuperscript{31} Gregory of Tours recounts how, at the death of St. Martin, bishop Severinus of Cologne hears a heavenly chorus. The bishop calls the archdeacon to his side and asks if he can hear anything. The archdeacon, after straining his ears and toes in an attempt to reach the sound’s source, concludes that he cannot. After prayer on the part of both men, the archdeacon finally can hear, but he relies on bishop Severinus to reveal the reason for the angels’ rejoicing.\textsuperscript{32}

This last example from Gregory’s \textit{Life of St. Martin} combines heavily physicalized signs with an apparent gift of interpretation based upon personal sanctity. The sound is quite literally coming from the direction of the sky. At first only one man can hear it, but after an earnest request for the phenomenon to be made more widely accessible it is made available to the presumably less holy archdeacon, who appears to most desire it. The archdeacon, however, while he can hear the sound, does not know what it means. He knows it is a sign, but of what he cannot conclude. This final act is reserved for the most deserving. The reader may be reminded of the distinction so memorably made by Augustine between the ability to see divinely created signs through spiritual vision and the ability to correctly interpret them through intellectual vision.\textsuperscript{33} In the context of the \textit{Book of Revelations}, however, this distinction is implicit, carried entirely within stories like this one since Augustine’s discussion of these modes of vision is absent.

These privileged sensory moments can come as both a reward for as well as a prompt to further sanctity. Saint Cuthbert seeks out Lindisfarne after he sees the soul of Bishop Aidan

\textsuperscript{30} LR 1.150 (106va); Athanasius Alexandrinus, \textit{Vita beati Antonii abbatis}, trans. Evagrius, Cap. 32. PL 73: 153 B.

\textsuperscript{31} LR 1.105 (94rb-94va); Gregory the Great, \textit{Dialogues}, 2.34, 1-2.

\textsuperscript{32} LR 1.96 (90vb-91ra); Gregory of Tours, \textit{De miraculis sancti Martini}, 1.4, PL 71: 918 A.

\textsuperscript{33} Augustine, \textit{De Genesi ad litteram}, 12.9, 20.
conveyed gloriously into heaven. Unlike his fellow shepherds, the young Cuthbert had remained awake in prayer, and was rewarded with this life-altering vision.  

A hermit on an island, somewhere between Sicily and Thessalonica, overhears a horde of demons complaining about how good a job the Cluniacs under Odilo are doing at snatching souls out of their grasp. The hermit shares this gossip with a pilgrim driven to the island by bad weather on his return from Jerusalem. This pilgrim brings the tale back to Cluny, leading the monks to redouble their efforts.

These visions can often occur during times of prayer. St. Dunstan, while visiting the church at Bath, prays after a meal. In the midst of his prayers, he looks up to see the soul of a boy, whom he had nurtured, gloriously carried into heaven. Priests singing the Mass, likewise, can also be the recipients of a vision, especially one that emphasizes the moment of transubstantiation. A monk under Abbot Serlo sees just this kind of vision when a troop of angels appears at the consecration of the host. On another occasion, this same monk is rapt outside himself, also during mass, and sees the same thing. We will see how prayer is very often involved in the prelude to the other types of revelatory access, and the border between an earth-bound prayer followed by a vision and being rapt out of one’s senses during or immediately after prayer can become thin indeed.

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34 LR 1.58 (77vb-78ra); Bede, *Vita S. Cuthberti*, 4; Bertram Colgrave, ed. *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede’s Prose Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 164, 166.
35 LR 1.36 (70va-71ra); Peter Damian, *Vita S. Odilionis*, 10.22; PL 144: 935C-937A.
37 LR 1.25 (66rb).
38 LR 1.24 (65vb).
The life of Godric of Finchale offers an exemplary distillation of the spiritual athlete as a visionary type who often experiences waking revelations.\(^{39}\) Godric regularly sees the souls of the departed led to their fate and in one instance even describes the portals through which they pass. Godric prays for the opportunity to see the soul of his companion hermit, Ailric, at the time of its exit from the flesh, and is quite worried that he may fall asleep and miss his chance. Godric’s wish is finally granted and he sees the spirit of his friend leave the body, an experience that he often recounts at the eager prodding of his monastic contacts.\(^{40}\) Godric makes a habit of seeing the souls of his friends, acquaintances and even strangers led to their ends. He watches the soul of his confessor, Abbot Robert of Newminster, led into heaven, an event which he describes in such detail, especially regarding the soul’s shape, that Reginald of Durham intervenes to emphasise that Godric did so only because the true nature of a soul cannot be understood by living human beings on its own terms.\(^{41}\) While watching Robert’s soul, Godric also explains how he saw the soul of the matron Editha led into heaven.\(^{42}\)

**Access to Revelation (2): Encounters with Death**

It should come as no surprise that knowledge of the fate of souls after death should often be conveyed in close proximity to death itself. Most obviously, the dead can appear to the living and deliver messages regarding the hereafter. The traffic between the living and the dead, however, can go in both directions as the living can also visit the realms of the dead. A journey of this kind by a living visionary most often involves the temporary separation of the soul from the visionary’s body. In this sense, the visionary can be described as temporarily dead. In both cases, the fundamental presupposition is that like can most easily see like. The dead, being

\(^{39}\) Benedicta Ward describes Godric’s visionary and prophetic experiences as an expression of the model of the desert fathers through a twelfth-century lens. *Miracles and the Medieval Mind*, 79.

\(^{40}\) LR 1.82 (85va-86rb); Reginald of Durham, *Vita Godrici*, 12.34-36.

\(^{41}\) LR 1.83 (86rb-86vb); *Vita Godrici*, 75.161-2.

\(^{42}\) LR 1.84 (86vb-87ra); *Vita Godrici*, 75.164-65. Pp. 174-5.
spirits, can of course see the spiritual realm. A visionary, taken outside of himself or herself and drawn into the spiritual world, can likewise see spiritual things while traveling as a spirit.

What constitutes a temporary death is fluid, embracing both complete death, that is later reversed, as well as a withdrawal from the senses that is akin to death. The idea that being “snatched” or “rapt” out of one’s senses was tantamount to a temporary death or functionally indistinguishable from it was an ancient one. Augustine famously employed this possibility in his consideration of Paul’s account in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 of a man “rapt” up to the Third Heaven. He concludes that Paul’s remark, “in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows,” refers to the apostle’s inability to decide if the visionary’s spirit had left the body entirely or if the visionary has simply been alienated from his bodily senses in an ecstasy. If the soul has totally departed, it would mean the visionary had been truly dead until the soul’s return. Importantly, even the apostle could not tell the difference between the two. Both options, complete separation or sensory withdrawal, entail an alienation from the body. The difference is a question of degree. This separation, indistinguishable from or identical to death, took the attention of the mind away from carnal things and allowed apprehension of spiritual things.

The visionary accounts contained in the Book of Revelations often emphasize the blurry boundary between complete removal from the body and an alienation from its sensory abilities. In many of these stories, the body appears “as if dead” while maintaining some minor signs of continued life. These signs serve important functions such as preventing a premature burial of the visionary. Nonetheless, the experience is always like death, or identical to it. In what follows,

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43 The most common verb that signals this kind of experience is *rapio*. For this and other specific visionary vocabulary, see discussion below.
44 Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, 12.4,14; Edmund Hill, trans., *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* (New York: Newman Press, 1982), 469. I should note that the visionary mentioned is taken to be Paul himself.
despite my separation of various experiences into different types, I would like to acknowledge Augustine’s admonition and emphasise the permeable boundaries between the temporarily dead visionary and the visionary who has been pulled so far away from his senses that he is “like the dead.” The subsequent section will focus on examples in which the soul of the visionary appears to have travelled to another reality before returning to this one. The next section will examine what Augustine regarded as the other possibility of Paul’s vision, an alienation from the senses that does not necessarily entail temporary death. Finally, I will move on to appearances of the “permanently” dead to the living. All three categories, however, maintain a kinship with death, following the overriding idea that like can most easily see like.

In visionary literature before the thirteenth century, the idea that a visionary travelled to the other side and brought back an account of what he had seen there often appears as the main avenue of knowledge regarding the life to come. Hugh of St. Victor, for example, cited souls snatched away and later returned to their bodies as one of the main avenues through which we know anything about the fate of souls. To support this assertion, Hugh cited material that can also be found in the Book of Revelations, particularly the story of the pilgrim on his way to the shrine of St. James at Santiago de Compostela. The devil in the guise of St. James convinces the pilgrim to mutilate and then kill himself. Later, by the intervention of Mary and St. James he is returned to life, bearing with him the story of what he had seen while dead. A fair amount of the excerpts present in the Book of Revelations follow in this mold.

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45 The return to life of all the dead at the resurrection notwithstanding.
47 Hugh of St. Victor, De sacramentis, 2.16: 436-37. The story is found in Peter’s compilation, LR 1.81(84rb-85va). The story itself originated within the Dicta Anselmi, 22, but also traveled independent of its literary origin. A fuller discussion of this story and its elements will follow near the end of the chapter.
In the rubrics, Peter often describes what he saw as clear examples of visionaries’ return from death with the verb *resuscitare* or “to resuscitate.” The model, which the stories described with this word follow, involves the death, or very near death, of a subject who then returns to life often by the intervention of a saint. The use of the verb *resuscitare* emphasizes the agency of the saints in bringing the dead back to life. After their return, these visionaries explain what they saw while they were on the “other side.” Fifteen chapters in the first book have their visionaries’ experiences described this way.⁴⁸ For example, Drythelm is described as “resuscitated from death.”⁴⁹ In this famous and influential vision from Bede’s *Historia*, Drythelm had been afflicted by a progressive illness that had at length led to his death “in the first period of the night.”⁵⁰ At dawn, however, he returned to life and immediately changed his behavior immensely as a result of the things he had seen. In Bede’s account, there is no doubt that the visionary had died and then returned.⁵¹

As in Bede’s account of Drythelm, the visionary’s death is explicit in a number of these excerpts. A group of early medieval saints’ lives provides a particularly rich cluster of such stories. St. Martial intervenes for a young man strangled to death by the devil.⁵² St. Julian, at the behest of a priest, resuscitates a dead man being led out to burial.⁵³ St. Remy raises a noble girl who has clearly died.⁵⁴ Likewise, St. John resuscitates a young man named Stacteus, and St.

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⁴⁸ LR 1.12, 1.27, 1.29, 1.30, 1.31, 1.35, 1.37, 1.51, 1.75, 1.78, 1.94, 1.103, 1.104, 1.122, 1.123.
⁴⁹ LR 1.12 (57ra); Peter gives his name as “Drichthelinus”
⁵⁰ LR 1.12 (57ra); Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, V.12.
⁵¹ Bede, *Historia*, V, 12. “quidam aliquandiu mortuus ad vitam resurrexit corporis” and “primo tempore noctis defunctus est.”
⁵² LR 1.27 (66vb); Pseudo-Aurelian, *Vita S. Martialis*, 17-18. “a diabolo suffocatus interiit.” St. Martial resuscitates a dead man in another similar excerpt, LR 1.78; *Vita sanctissimi S. Martialis*, 5.
⁵⁴ LR 1.30 (69rb); Hincmar of Rheims, *Vita S. Remigii episcopi Remensis*, 9. “et effuso lacrimarum inbre consurgens suscituit mortuam.”
Martin raises a catechumen who died suddenly before baptism.\textsuperscript{55} The excerpts taken from Gregory’s \textit{Dialogues} contain a number of these episodes involving the return of an individual who is clearly dead.\textsuperscript{56} One of these is a retelling of Augustine’s story of mistaken identity regarding the two Curmas, one of whom is summoned mistakenly to the Other World in place of the other. Augustine’s two Curmas has appeared twice already in the \textit{Liber revelationum}, making its plot particularly noticeable.\textsuperscript{57} In Gregory’s version, a Stephen dies and is sent back to life by the celestial bureaucracy because he is the wrong Stephen.\textsuperscript{58} In all of these cases, the person is clearly resuscitated from death and returns with a story to tell about what they saw while dead.

In addition to \textit{resuscitare}, Peter’s rubrics describe some excerpts involving temporarily dead visionaries with a form of the verb \textit{redeo}, or “return.” The verb \textit{redeo} most often refers to the visionary’s return from death or return to the body. One potential effect or explanation for Peter’s different word choice in the rubrics of these items could be that they focus less on the agency bringing the visionary back from death than on the experience itself. For example, a monk named Ansbert returns from death to take communion and describe the torments he had endured up to that point.\textsuperscript{59} An excerpt from Gregory’s \textit{Dialogues} recounts how a monk named Peter died and returned to describe the sufferings of the dead in the hereafter that he had witnessed.\textsuperscript{60} After the rubric, Peter rewrites the beginning of the excerpt found in the original

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\textsuperscript{55} For John, LR 1.51 (75rb); Abidas, \textit{Historia certaminis apostolici}, trans. Sextus Julius Africanus, V, 17, “cum quidam iuuenis defunctus efferretur ad sepeliendum…” For Martin, LR 1.94 (90rb); Sulpicius Severus, \textit{Vita S. Martini}, 7, “regressus [Martinus] exanime corpus inuenit. Ita subita mors fuerat.”
\textsuperscript{56} LR 1.103; \textit{Dialogues}, 1.10 17-19. LR 1.104; \textit{Dialogues}, 1.12 1-3. LR 1.122; \textit{Dialogues}, 4.37 5-7, 1-2. \textsuperscript{57} The story of Curma (\textit{De cura}, 12) appears for the first time in the excerpt of the \textit{De cura pro mortuis gerenda} found in the prologue. It appears a second time by itself as a chapter, 1.26 (66r-66v). In the rubric for chapter twenty-six, Curma is described as sick and almost dead, “egrotans et iacens quasi mortuus.”
\textsuperscript{58} LR 1.122 (99va); \textit{Dialogues}, 4.37, 5-7, 1-2. Unlike Curma, Gregory’s first Stephen actually dies, “molestaque corporis superueniente defunctus est.”
\textsuperscript{59} LR 1.52 (75vb); \textit{Vita S. Ebrulfi abbatis Uticensis} (Vita A1), \textit{The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis}, ed. Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), i.208. The monk’s death is explicit: “quodam die unus ex fratribus defunctus est.”
\textsuperscript{60} LR 1.121 (99ra-b); \textit{Dialogues}, 4.37.3-4.
vita to orient the reader. In his summary, he also uses the verb *resuscitare* to describe the monk’s return, emphasizing that these types of visionary conveyance are in his opinion identical.\(^\text{61}\)

Not all of these stories are so clear-cut, and in a number of them the visionary appears only partially or incompletely dead. For example, a disciple of St. Winvaloe beseeches the saint to allow him to raise his mother. The crowd around, in an echo of Luke 8:53-8:55, laughs because they believe her to be dead. Winvaloe’s disciple, however, believes that “her soul was still contained within her limbs,” and after sprinkling her with holy water resuscitates her.\(^\text{62}\) In another revealing example, St. Maur resuscitates a boy right at the moment of death. The original vita states that the boy, “drawing his last breath, lying in bed was being covered over with death near.”\(^\text{65}\) Peter rewrites the beginning of this excerpt as he often does. He interprets the boy’s state as, “now in the last moment of life, scarcely maintaining his sensible spirit, who was nevertheless thought by many to be dead.”\(^\text{64}\) Upon his awakening, the boy describes how he had just been snatched away from an otherworldly tribunal that had sentenced him to burn.\(^\text{65}\) Peter’s reference to the sensible spirit is revealing. The boy describes the hereafter, not by virtue of a complete separation from his body and its senses, but rather because his connection to his senses had thinned almost to nonexistence. The impression is that virtually as soon as regular sensory input ceases, the experience of the soul immediately fills the gap.\(^\text{66}\)

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\(^\text{61}\) LR 1.121 (99ra). The rubric reads, “Qualiter Petrus monachus a mortuis redivi…” The rewritten beginning the excerpt itself states, “De quodam mortuo et resuscitato qui infernales penas uidit et narravit beatus Gregorius ita scribit.”


\(^\text{63}\) Odo Glannafoliensis, *Vita S. Mauri abbatis*, 27; *Acta SS*. Ian. I (1643), 1044. “qui me tuis lachrimis et meritis a tribunali, de quo tristem exceperam sententiam, qua iam incendiosis deputatus eram locis.”

\(^\text{64}\) LR 1.31 (69va), “iuxta domum cuiusdam mulieris uidue habentis filium iam in ultimo uite articulo uix sensibilem spiritum trahentem qui tamen a pluribus putabatur mortuus.”

\(^\text{65}\) LR 1.31 (69va); Odo Glannafoliensis, *Vita S. Mauri abbatis*, 28. “qui me tuis lachrimis et meritis a tribunali, de quo tristem exceperam sententiam, qua iam incendiosis deputatus eram locis.”

\(^\text{66}\) Such a scheme would be fully consistent with many important twelfth-century texts explaining the processes of the soul. In particular, the *Liber de spiritu et anima* proposes just such a process, *Liber de spiritu et
A large number of stories, introduced in a variety of ways by the rubrics, follow these last examples, involving visionaries who did not die but rather withdrew from their senses for some reason. This alienation from the senses allows the mind to apprehend spiritual realities more clearly. Many of these instances involve serious illness. For example, Reparatus in the midst of his final illness appears to have died before awaking to describe his vision of torments prepared in the hereafter. Promptly after relating his vision, Reparatus finally dies. Peter in his rubric expresses uncertainty whether Reparatus had momentarily returned from death or an ecstasy to deliver his message. A withdrawal from the senses similar to that experienced at the separation of the soul from the body can prompt visionary experiences.

Many of these kinds of visions accompany serious illness and often occur as an individual is dying. Often the visionary can see the angels or demons waiting to carry their souls away to their rewards or punishments. An excerpt taken from Gregory the Great provides a good example. A rich man, shortly before his death, sees a horde of terrible spirits waiting to carry him to hell. His family, gathered around his deathbed, sees nothing but can tell by the dying man’s face and words that he is confronting evil spirits. After a final, futile plea for more time, the wealthy man dies. Gregory cites this story as a good example of a vision seen for the benefit of others as it did the rich man no good. Much more recently, Abbot Benedict of Stratford Langthorne told Peter how the cantor Herveus was comforted by an angelic person, later suggested to be Mary. This appearance as well as later visitations gave the cantor comfort as he

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67 LR 1.114 (97ra-b); Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, 4.32.2.

68 LR 1.114 (97ra). “Qualiter Reparatus a mortuis siue ab extasi rediens sed statim postea mortuus…”

69 LR 1.126 (101ra-b); *Dialogues*, 4.40.6-9.
approached his death.\textsuperscript{70} In these cases, those on the threshold of death gain a foretaste of what waits on the other side, aided by their relative proximity to it.

Visionaries can and often do recover from the illnesses that prompt an alienation from the body’s senses. The \textit{Vision of the Monk of Eynsham} provides an excellent example of such a vision brought on by a health crisis that almost led to death. The young monk Edmund, a recent convert to the monastic life, is stricken with some kind of wasting disease for a year and three months.\textsuperscript{71} The young man’s symptoms are often so severe that he is unable to eat, at one point for more than nine days. After suffering for this long period, he begins to feel somewhat better and makes more of an effort to participate in the hours with the other brothers. On the morning of Good Friday, however, the brothers find him unconscious before the abbot’s seat. Edmund appears almost dead; his eyes are sunken and smeared with blood from his nose. His feet were very cold, but some heat appeared to linger within the rest of his body, and the other monks could barely detect faint breathing.\textsuperscript{72} He lay in that state for two days, before returning and at length, after repeated requests, relayed what he had seen. One of the monks who first badgered Edmund to tell his story appears to suggest that Edmund’s spirit had left the living world, despite the faint survival of his body, when he asks the young monk to tell him of the things “he had seen while taken away from the world in spirit” during his ecstasy.\textsuperscript{73} Edmund himself states that he had been “snatched up in an excess of mind” (\textit{in excessu mentis}).\textsuperscript{74}

The Latin phrase \textit{excessus mentis} is a common way of describing the mental state of visionaries in Latin medieval literature. Equivalent to \textit{extasis}, or ecstasy, the phrase implies the

\textsuperscript{70} LR 1.183 (120vb-121ra-b); Sharpe and Easting, 226.  
\textsuperscript{71} Edmund describes his illness as “tabescerem invalitudine corporis.” \textit{Visio Monachi de Eynsham}, ed. P. Michael Huber, Cap. 9, 654.  
\textsuperscript{72} LR 1.10 (33va); \textit{Visio Monachi de Eynsham}, 2, 648.  
\textsuperscript{73} LR 1.10 (34va); \textit{Visio Monachi de Eynsham}, 6, 652.  
\textsuperscript{74} LR 1.10 (36ra); \textit{Visio Monachi de Eynsham}, 13, 658.
exceeding of boundaries and is thus linked to other meanings of the word *excessus*, including: “surplus, exuberance, transgression and death.”

In this state, the visionary surpasses his regular limitations, particularly his epistemological ones. Despite its array of potential meanings, the term can often be safely said to imply “a ‘higher state’ encountered while ‘standing outside the mind.’” The experiences described as *excessus mentis* or *extasis* were linked to and often identical with “rapture” or *raptus*. Taken from the verb *rapio*, “to snatch, seize, carry off, or rape,” this term refers to the visionary literally being snatched up and ravished by the Holy Spirit.

Peter does not foreground *excessus mentis* in his rubrics, but he does use forms of *rapio* and *extasis*. We have already seen how Peter described the experience of Reparatus, found in Gregory’s *Dialogues*, as either death or an ecstasy. Likewise, he describes how a monk named Hugo in the monastery of Stratford Langthorne was “rapt in ecstasy.” This experience is still quite similar to serious illness and death. Hugo is seized by a sudden pain and loses consciousness. He is withdrawn so far outside himself that the other monks wonder if he is alive or dead. Eventually, Hugo returns to himself from the ecstasy and tells how he stood before Mary and St. Thomas at the Tribunal of the Lord. Similarly, St. Bernard is “rapt before the Tribunal of the Lord” to respond to objections raised by Satan. Bernard’s experience is also prefaced by an illness so severe his brethren expected him to die.

77 LR 1.114 (97ra-b); Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, 4.32.2.
78 LR 1.184 (121ra); Sharpe and Easting, 228. “De Monancho rapto in extasi cuius maria et sanctus Thomas uitam inpetrarunt.”
79 LR 1.184(121ra); Sharpe and Easting, 228. “Et quia fratres dubitabant an uius esset aud mortuus…”
80 LR 1.62 (78vb-79ra); Alan of Auxerre, *Vita secunda S. Bernardi*, 13. 39. PL 185: 491 C. The text of this vision also describes Bernard’s experience as an *excessus mentis*. 
So far, temporary death, imminent death, illness, and “ecstasy” can all prompt similar
types of visionary experience. All of these modes of access to revelation can be described as
being close or identical to death. One of the key underlying features appears to be an alienation
from the regular senses of the body.\textsuperscript{81} This alienation, in the instances explored above, tends to
carry with it the tone of death. Such a tenor is of course appropriate for the materials in the first
book, dealing with revelations regarding life after death. At its simplest, knowledge of existence
after death arises in inverse proportion to the experience of life, and this experience of life is
synonymous with that of the regular bodily senses.

\textit{Appearances of the Dead to the Living}

While the living, in various ways, can visit the realm of the dead, the dead too can return
to the world of the living to reveal their fates as well as the fates of others. These apparitions
pursue goals familiar to a number of scholarly studies detailing the “invasion of ghosts” found in
texts from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{82} The ways the spirits of the dead appear to the
living in the excerpts Peter collected are often distinctive, betraying the particular genres and
social groups from which he drew his stories. Peter’s Cistercian connections in particular shaped
the way apparitions of the dead appear in a number of the selections he chose. The significance
of this relationship will be more fully developed in later chapters. For now, I would like to focus
on the methods by which the dead are contacted, and the circumstances in which they appear in
this group of stories, drawn from Peter’s acquaintances.

\textsuperscript{81} Other texts explicitly spell out this assumption in a theoretical manner. For example, Aelred of Rievaulx, \textit{De anima}, ed. A. Hoste and C. H. Talbot, CCCM 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1971), 3.9, 735. “Itaque, quamdui homo vivit in corpore, corporeis movetur sensibus, et vix raro vigilans ab his extrahitur, cum scilicet in exessum rapitur, aut morbo sensus turbatur, aut alterius nature spiritu in aliiud avocatur, vel vehementiori cogitatione mens ab his sensibus in seipsa recipitur, et diffusa in multis ad unum aliquid colligitur.”

\textsuperscript{82} As discussed in chapter one, accounts of apparitions and their involvement in medieval cultural and
One especially prominent feature of the stories Peter collected from his oral contacts is the number of agreements between individuals to return after death. These stories are not rare, but neither are they as common elsewhere as they appear in Peter’s milieu. One historical character, who emerges in the *Book of Revelations*, specializes in these agreements. William the parochial priest of Lesnes provided Peter with three such stories, whose plots are largely identical in their basic structure. In all three, William, while presumably providing last rites, asks a dying man to return from the dead and inform the priest of his fate. William makes this request of a regular canon named John, Robert the subprior of Holy Trinity, and a servant also named John.

All three of these men keep their promises, appearing to William after their deaths, and they appear at similar times and in similar ways. All three return around thirty days after their deaths. Likewise, whenever enough details are given, the appearances of the dead correspond closely to sleep. The canon John returns while William is sleeping. The servant John appears to the priest while he is “awake and lying on his bed around the ninth hour.” The exact circumstances surrounding subprior Robert’s appearance are vague, but the story itself is suggestive. After appearing, Robert takes William to see his dwelling place in the crypt of St. Stephen. This instantaneous journey suggests that the priest had been taken outside himself, and

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83 For example, I will argue that one of Peter’s own stories of a return from death according to an earlier agreement is clearly influenced by a story from Herbert of Clairvaux’s *Liber miraculorum* (which made its way into the *Exordium magnum*), LR 1.204; *Liber Miraculorum* 3.1 (PL 185: 1354-55); *Exordium Magnum* 2.24 (CCCM 138). Other such agreement stories have been studied by Robert Easting, “Dialogue between a Clerk and the Spirit of a Girl de purgatorio (1153): A Medieval Ghost Story” *Mediaevistik* 20 (2007): 163-183. While other examples can be cited, few if any groupings of so many in one source can be found anywhere else.

84 These are: LR 1.186 (John the Canon), 1.204 (Subprior Robert), 1.206 (John the Servant).

85 All three describe the day, “circa triessimum diem mortis sue.”

86 LR 1.186 (122rb); Sharpe and Easting, 260. “illi dormienti apparuit.”

87 LR 1.206 (126va), Sharpe and Easting, 264. “predicto sacerdoti uigilanti et super lectum suum circa horam nonam accubitanti.”
at the end the experience is called a “vision.” One might suspect that William would have appeared catatonic or asleep. Robert also appeared to a recluse at Braughing and also showed her the crypt where he awaits the mercy of God with St. Stephen. This time, Robert specifically appears at night, and the experience is also termed a vision.

These correspondences between stories are significant in a number of ways. The return thirty days after death recalls the tricenary, or period of liturgical commemoration after death. The correspondences between appearances of the dead and their commemoration will occur again in the Book of Revelations in materials gathered from the monks of Stratford Langthorne. Most of these experiences occur specifically while asleep, at night, or in bed, leading the reader to infer that sleep is a unifying factor. Interestingly, the visionary is specifically stated to be asleep for one appearance, while he is unequivocally awake for another, even if he is in bed. For this last apparition, the ninth hour may be significant. The story could refer to either the ninth hour of the night or day. The ninth hour of the day, an ideal time for private prayer, was also a time for temptation, particularly to sloth or melancholy. It was also a favored time for demonic visitation. William is initially terrified of John before the dead servant identifies himself, suggesting that the priest may have taken him at first to literally be “the midday demon.” The story John goes on to tell of damnation for sin, added to the timing of his appearance and the priest’s position in bed, may carry an air of rebuke for William.

William of Lesnes was not the only one of Peter’s acquaintances making such agreements. A pact to return after death lies behind three stories originating from the Cistercian

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88 LR 1.204 (124rb), Sharpe and Easting, 262. “Et sic uisio illius disparuit.” The ending of the vision given to the recluse of Braughing is identical.

monks of Stratford Langthorne. In two of these instances, the agreement is referred to only in passing. In the third, however, it is developed substantially, taking the form of a written contract.

Two monks, named Roger and Alexander, friends since their noviciate, agree that the one to die first will return to the other. They draw up a contract between them to solemnize their agreement. Even though Roger remains a lay brother and Alexander becomes a priest monk, their bond remains throughout their lives. As Alexander lies on his deathbed, Roger reminds him of their arrangement, which Alexander fulfills dutifully after his death.

These stories mirror the elements already noted in the stories from William of Lesnes, regarding date and time. The return of the dead corresponds to their liturgical commemoration. In the first story, the dead monk appears on the same day he died, while his living colleague is keeping vigil. He reports that he escaped purgatory immediately after the litany was finished over his corpse. In the second account, a dead monk appears to the brother who had tended him in his illness thirty days after his death. He promises that a Cistercian cannot remain in purgatory for more than thirty days, unless bound by a criminal fault. In that case, a Cistercian must wait a year, until absolved by the General Chapter. In the third and most elaborate story, Roger and Alexander work out three options regarding possible return times all of which we have already seen in the earlier tales: the day of death, thirty days after death, and one year after death. Alexander appears first around the thirtieth day, while Roger is lying awake in bed. He returns again after one year to report his entrance into blessedness. This second appearance after one year is especially appropriate given Cistercian liturgical commemoration of the dead. In addition

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90 They are: 1.201, 1.202, 1.205.
91 LR 1.201 (123rb); Sharpe and Easting, 230.
92 LR 1.202 (123rb-123va); Sharpe and Easting, 230, 232. For the absolution at the General Chapter, Danièle Choisselet and Placide Vernet, eds. *Les ecclesiastica officia Cisterciens du XIIème Siècle* (Reiningue: Oelenberg, 1989), 98.41-44.
93 LR 1.205 (124va-126rb); Sharpe and Easting, 236-47.
to possible absolution at the General Chapter, monk priests, like Alexander, were eligible for an extra twenty masses within a year in addition to absolution at the General Chapter. Alexander’s final appearance may then correspond to the fulfillment of his extra twenty masses rather than an absolution at the General Chapter.

These spirits, likewise, appear at similar times of day, and to visionaries who are close to sleep. When specified, these spirits all return at night. In two of these cases, the visionaries are in bed. In the other, the recipient is keeping vigil. Interestingly, in all three some effort is taken to emphasize, that despite the time and location, the living monks are awake, in contrast to the ambivalence found in the stories originating from William of Lesnes, who is asleep and then awake.

In all these stories, drawn from Peter’s own acquaintances, of the dead fulfilling agreements to appear to the living we have seen a number of common elements. First, the dead tend to return when their liturgical commemorations are completed. Second, the dead appear to men who are sleeping, or apparently close to sleeping. The vast majority of these visitations happen at night, and the recipient is often in bed. It is interesting that sometimes the visionary is explicitly awake, while in at least one instance he is unproblematically asleep. At times it appears that being wide awake is preferable, but a sleeping visionary can be accepted. This ambivalence highlights the difficulty of separating many of the experiences described so far in this entire chapter from dreaming.

**Access to Revelation (3): Revelations Received While Asleep**

I have held revelations delivered to sleeping visionaries for the last because this category of experience binds together almost all of the other types of visionary experience detailed above.

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94 *Ecclesiastica officia*, 98.47-51.
95 1.202, 1.205. In chapter 205, Roger is in bed both times Alexander appears to him.
96 LR 1.201.
Dreaming, in many cases, also can resist a neat separation from other kinds of visionary experience. Even the visionary him or herself may have difficulties separating the types of experiences that could be grouped under the rubric of dreaming. Sometimes the timing of an experience is the only indication of whether one should assume the visionary was asleep. Furthermore, accounts of night-time apparitions also suggest phenomena frequently encountered while asleep that have nothing to do with revelation but rather with physiology. The English word “dream” covers a range of phenomena that may have separate causation in medieval sources. Revelations received while sleeping mix the other avenues discussed above and introduce other potential uncertainties that could undermine claims to revelatory visionary experience. As Steven Kruger has observed, dreams required cautious discernment.\footnote{Kruger, \textit{Dreaming in the Middle Ages}, 50-51.}

Dreams, or perhaps more accurately revelations delivered through sleep, held a special significance for Peter, and many of the revelations he records were specifically delivered through them. Peter does not include material from “dream manuals” to aid in interpretation, but rather records experiences that speak for themselves, with Augustine’s \textit{Care to be Taken for the Dead} acting as the only theoretical aid.\footnote{As a result, any influence from the traditions of Macrobius, Calcidius, or Aristotle must be inferred, and indeed is not really necessary for the picture Peter presents. For the influence that these authors exerted on dreaming in the twelfth century, see Kruger, \textit{Dreaming in the Middle Ages}, 57-122.} In particular, the reader encounters both Augustine’s \textit{Dream of Gemnadius} as well as the \textit{Dream of John of Orpington} in the prologue. These excerpts advance Peter’s argument, demonstrated via dreams, that the soul carries with it something of the divine, which not only allows insight into the future, but most importantly testifies to its immortality. Likewise, Augustine’s \textit{Dream of Gemnadius} establishes a parallelism between the experience of a dreamer and the mode of existence for the soul separated from its body by
death.\textsuperscript{99} Already, attention to exact vocabulary can be revealing. Peter specifies that John’s vision was something seen in sleep.\textsuperscript{100} The significance of his exact choices in vocabulary will become clearer with a consideration of other examples of phenomena experienced by sleeping visionaries.

Beyond the initial revelations in the prologue delivered through sleep, Peter specifies in his rubrics that a number of other visions in his collection were experienced “in sleep” or “in a dream” (\textit{in sompnis}). Some sights seen while sleeping receive this title, while others do not. Most of the time, Peter is following the vocabulary used in the source texts. For example, a nun at Wilton finds herself with Edith of Wilton while asleep (\textit{per soporem}) in order to hear a rapacious relative’s plea.\textsuperscript{101} Likewise, the rubric for an excerpt from Rufinus of Aquila uses the vocabulary of its source text, which specified that the revelation shared by Apollonius and a “famous robber” came through sleep (\textit{a sompno}).\textsuperscript{102} Peter does seem to be taking pains to use the specific vocabulary specified in the source to describe the visionary’s state.

A revelation seen by a young man who tended Godric of Finchale is also introduced with wording drawn from the excerpt itself describing the visionary’s state, but in this case some editorial choices are also evident. The original \textit{Vita} of Reginald of Durham explains how the young man, while returning from Godric’s hermitage early in the morning, was overcome with sleepiness and paused off the road to rest and quickly fell asleep (\textit{sompnium}). Immediately after falling asleep he experienced an excess of mind (\textit{in mentis excessu factus est}), in which he

\textsuperscript{99} This parallel between the experience of dreaming and that of a soul without a body is recurrent in Augustine’s work. Perhaps his most famous elaboration of it can be found in the \textit{De Genesi}, 12.33. This section found its way into many later eschatological works, particularly the \textit{Prognosticum futuri saeculi of Julian of Toledo}, 2.16. In the \textit{Book of Revelations}, the story of Gemnadius is the best example present.

\textsuperscript{100} LR (4vb), Sharpe and Easting, 88. “Quod quadam nocte sibi in lecto et in domo sua dormienti iustum fuit quod…”

\textsuperscript{101} LR 1.77 (82vb). “sanctimonialis soror uidit se per soporem apud beatam Edgytham deuinire…”

\textsuperscript{102} LR 1.154 (107va); Rufinus Aquileiensis, \textit{Historia monachorum in Aegypto}, 7.8.2-8. PL 21: 415 A-C.
encountered John the Baptist. Peter summarises a great deal leading up to his excerpt, stating only, “With saint John the Baptist leading a certain young, faithful man in a dream (in somnus) and showing many things to him….” We see again Peter’s relative indifference to the formula in excessu mentis. He has chosen to retain only the reference to sleep or dreaming.

Many more of Peter’s visions are delivered in ways similar to sleep or dreams, but not specifically called such. We have already seen a number of potential examples above. To these I would like to add a few particularly important instances not yet covered. Most prominently Peter’s grandfather Ailsi experiences his long vision of the Other World, prompted by the death of his son Pagan, “in a nocturnal vision.” In these cases, Peter is free to use whatever wording he wants to describe his grandfather’s state of mind. Ailsi’s otherworldly tour with Pagan is not the only significant dream-like vision experienced by Ailsi. In another episode, he sees St. Stephen and some angelic boys inspecting the tower he was constructing for Stephen’s church. Ailsi spies them from a distance “one night in a vision while lying on the ground in prayer.” In his other appearances, St. Stephen most often appears to Ailsi at night, suggesting that these other accounts of his interactions with the saint may also have come while asleep. Peter calls none of these episodes dreams (somnium); rather, he calls them visions or visiones, often specifically visions seen at night. It seems most of Ailsi’s supernatural experiences occurred in what we would call dreams, but why is it that Peter does not call these episodes dreams but rather nocturnal visions?

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103 Reginald of Durham, Vita S. Godrici, Item aliud argumentum, 2.317-21, pp. 333-37. The language describing the young man’s state echoes that of Paul’s vision in 2 Cor 12, “somno igitur depressus, statim in mentis excessu factus est, et sive in corpore vel extra corpus positus, Dei visionibus taliter positus est.”
104 LR 1.89 (88rb) “Sancto Johanne baptista quondam iuuenem servientem Godrici in sompniis ducente et ei plura ostendente, predictus iuuenis multos demones uidit.”
105 LR 1.6.13 (26rb), Sharpe and Easting, 202. “misit [Deus] ei in uisione nocturna filium suum…”
106 LR 1.6.5 (24ra), Sharpe and Easting, 190. “Una noctium in uisione uidit predictus vir Dei eminus in terra in oratione iacens…”
107 LR 1.6.4, 1.6.6, 1.6.7. These experiences are not called visions or visiones; instead, Stephen appears (form of appareo) or simply comes (venio) to Ailsi.
What exactly Peter intends or understands by the use of the term “nocturnal vision,” and other word choices surrounding things seen in sleep, may become clearer through a consideration of two instances where “nocturnal vision” appears in other excerpts. Both originate from the Dialogues of Gregory the Great. Peter again follows the vocabulary choices from the text and calls these experiences “nocturnal visions” in his rubrics. In their original context in the Dialogues, these episodes lead up to the question of whether or not one ought to trust “nocturnal visions,” or things seen while asleep. In response, Gregory outlines the six ways dreams come to the human soul. The first two are physiological; namely, dreams can arise from a full stomach or an empty stomach. The remaining four involve an outside influence contacting the mind. Two of these ways are demonic. Dreams can be either solely demonic illusions or demonic illusions mixed in with our own thoughts. The last two are actual divine revelation and are the mirror image of the demonic possibilities. These dreams can be entirely revelation or our own thoughts mixed with revelation. Only those so blessed by God can tell the difference between the six possibilities, and all of them can be properly termed “nocturnal visions.”

When Peter has free reign then, he chooses to use basic language identical to that found in his selections from the Dialogues, highlighting that his grandfather’s visions belong to a category of human experience with multiple causes. Nocturnal visions can cover all nighttime apparitions, which unlike modern dreams can arise from three sources: the human being and his mind or body, the demonic, and the divine. Ailsi’s nocturnal visions arise from the divine, and the proof of this origin lies in their plots. In each something beneficial, truthful, and useful is revealed that Ailsi could not otherwise have known: for example, a cheating stone-hauler, or the

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108 LR 1.138 (104ra-b) and 1.139 (104rb-104va); Gregory, Dialogues, 4.49.4-5, and 4.49.6-7.
109 Gregory, Dialogues, 4.50. For a discussion of Gregory’s classification in the context of the history of dreaming, see Kruger, Dreaming in the Middle Ages, 43-45.
location of a limepit. His nocturnal visions, like that of John of Orpington, are veridical. Here we have arrived at what appears to be Peter’s basic understanding of revelations delivered in sleep. Nocturnal visions were one particularly common avenue for divine communication with human minds, but this mode of communication was one that required some level of discernment because they could arise from multiple causes. We all see nocturnal visions, but not all of these visions mean something. Those Peter chose to record did carry meaning, as is often proven in the excerpts themselves.

Conclusion Part 3

The survey of the ways in which the spiritual world becomes accessible to human beings in *The Book of Revelations* has developed several overarching themes. Despite myriad permutations, revelations tend to occur when the regular sensory input of an individual is disrupted. The senses can be disrupted in multiple ways. Death, illness, or loss of consciousness can all accomplish this interruption. As in Peter’s summary of the story involving St. Maur and the dying boy, the thinning of the soul’s connection to the sensory capabilities of the body time and again proves decisive. Revelation, however, does not have to be accompanied by such a dramatic rupture between the mind and the sensory spirit. Waking individuals can become privy to spiritual realities in addition to their regular senses, but most often such an addition of spiritual vision to bodily vision is granted to people who are particularly deserving and unusual. Such deserving and unusual people are often monks, priests, and hermits such as Godric of Finchale. In contrast to remarkable ecclesiastics and hermits, great sinners more often approach divine revelation through a dramatic rupture with the senses.

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110 LR 1.6.2 (for the cheating stone-hauler), 1.6.3 (for the limepit). St. Stephen also reveals that a lime-kiln will not threaten the near-by houses of the canons (1.6.4). In all cases, what Ailsi sees comes to pass.
111 LR 1.31. Please see notes 63 and 65.
The timing of revelatory experiences has proven to be significant, and can be directly related to the visionaries’ state. The excerpts show a proclivity for night-time apparitions, suggesting sleep or states close to sleep. Various devotional and liturgical activities also play a key role in the timing of visionary episodes. The consecration of the host, the beginning and ending of periods of commemoration for the dead, lonely vigils, and independent prayer have all served as springboards for visions of life after death. These devotional and liturgical activities speak to an individual’s state of mind before an experience, and also may suggest potential meditative techniques like those proposed by Barbara Newman.112

Those receiving revelations not only want them, but also serve as founts of knowledge for others. In the examples I have examined, revelations often come to especially desirous or deserving individuals. As stated above, the gift of special senses tends to pertain to spiritual athletes, such as Godric of Finchale. Part of these individuals’ athleticism resides in their desire to see and experience something spiritual. Much the same spirit guides the desires and actions of the men who form pacts to return from the dead to tell their friends about their fate and the nature of existence after death. Almost all of our examples involve monks, canons, priests or other religious individuals. Some, however, such as the Dream of John of Orpington or the Visions of Ailsi, have laymen as their protagonists. In these examples, some of the proclivities evident in Peter’s collection can be seen as indicative of the directions in which the visionary, or revelatory, genres were heading.

Part 4: Questionable Access - Problems in the Delivery of Revelation

The modes of delivery for revelation outlined above, in particular dreaming, could pose a number of difficulties. As we have seen in the last chapter, there were multiple questions and

112 See discussion of “What Did it Mean to Say ‘I Saw’?” in chapter 1.
potential difficulties regarding visions’ causation, and these concerns, in fact, do appear within the *Book of Revelations*.\(^{113}\) Revelation had to be separated from mundane phenomena, caused by physiological processes as well as demonic deception. Peter’s excerpts do not include theoretical discussions regarding the discernment of spirits or other such topics.\(^ {114}\) This lack of overt theoretical discussion, however, does not mean these issues are absent from the *Book of Revelations*. As so much else the reader encounters, difficulties or uncertainties regarding the delivery of revelation and its separation from the mundane are implicit. The moment of discourse, frozen in the form of this collection, about the relationship between the spiritual and material worlds carries these concerns within it, and Peter himself provides one particularly telling example in his reaction to the story of Edmund of Eynsham, as well as his prominent inclusion of the *Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii*.

The first item in the *Book of Revelations* after the prologue is remarkable for the ways it problematizes the issue of the revelation’s delivery and the nature of visionary experience. The *Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii*, or *St. Patrick’s Purgatory*, differs from all of the other experiences detailed above regarding the way the visionary claims to have gained access to the spiritual world.\(^ {115}\) The knight Owein, a former follower of King Stephen, seeks to atone for his sins while still in this world. Returning to his native Ireland, he literally walks into the Other World after descending into a cave on an island in Donegal. The knight does not fall asleep.

\(^{113}\) Scholarly studies of some of these questions are summarized in the first chapter.

\(^{114}\) Much of this literature flourished after his period, but drew on questions and concerns present within the material found in the *Book of Revelations*. The discernment of spirits has been the topic of a number of studies. Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003). Dyan Elliot, *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitorial Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

enter a trance, or an ecstasy; he remains fully awake and experiences everything bodily through his regular senses.

In the context of the *Book of Revelations*, the delivery of revelation in the *Tractatus* is exceptional. In fact, Peter’s own unique story regarding St. Patrick’s Purgatory, which follows the *Tractatus* in the manuscript, makes no such claim. At that story’s conclusion, the visionary wakes up after having his brains bashed out of his skull in a vision.\(^{116}\) While there was an actual pilgrimage to St. Patrick’s Purgatory in the later Middle Ages that gave rise to numerous other narratives, the *Tractatus* is the first major account detailing Lough Derg to the wider audience of Europe.\(^{117}\) Rather than an object of direct acquaintance, St. Patrick’s Purgatory is an element of the mysterious West, where late-twelfth and early-thirteenth century readers appear to have actually believed living human beings could directly encounter the spiritual world by literally walking into it as a result of the popularity of the *Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii*. While it ostensibly describes a “real” place, in Peter’s time, its context lay alongside the other visionary tours of the Other World with which he chose to place it.

Owein’s claim to have walked into Purgatory does not go unchallenged or unexcused in the text. The preface to the vision, as well as a list of testimonies found at its end, respond to the apparent novelty of an embodied visionary. The vision’s preface is most revealing for a consideration of what it is that the visionary actually encountered, and will be discussed at length in the next chapter. One of the final testimonies, however, is quite revealing regarding how this

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\(^{116}\) LR 1.5 (22vb). “Cumque sic diutissime illuderetur, mane iam adueniente, disparuerunt omnes illi ministri iniquitatis cum rege suo Gulino, et omnes pene eius euanuerunt cum ipsa uisione sua, et inuenit se miles in introitu Purgatorii a quo prius in Purgatorium intrauerat, nichil eorum que uiderat uidens.

\(^{117}\) Peter’s unique account of St. Patrick’s Purgatory is in fact the first to correctly describe the division into two islands: Station Island and the smaller Saints’ Island. The Purgatory at Lough Derg was eventually destroyed by order of the pope in 1497 after a canon entered the cave and saw nothing. Shane Leslie, *St. Patrick’s Purgatory: A Record from History and Literature* (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1932), 61-63. Numerous later destructions of the “rebuilt” cave followed in later centuries, many of them tied to Protestant vs. Catholic tensions and polemics.
vision differs from others. Unlike visions where the visionary experiences everything spiritually with a dormant body, Owein is unambiguously awake and in full command of his faculties. How this state differs from that expected of a visionary is clearly laid out in an exchange appended to the vision itself. One audience member, present for a recitation of the knight’s story, states that he doubts that Owein’s descent happened in the way he claims. The Cistercian monk, named Gilbert, who had told Owein’s story, responds that some people do claim that those who enter the cave fall into an ecstasy and see everything in spirit. The knight, on the contrary, had always denied that it happened in that way, insisting that he travelled corporally.\textsuperscript{118} Gilbert then adds another story from his experience similar to Owein’s.\textsuperscript{119} Gilbert clearly responds to the doubter’s question as a challenge regarding Owein’s departure from regular visionary tropes. Why then would an embodied visionary be desirable if this embodiment is so novel and open to attack?

\textit{St. Patrick’s Purgatory} proved enormously popular, and its visionary’s unique truth claim likely played a prominent role in its success as well as Peter’s choice to place it first in his collection. As I will argue in the next chapter, Owein’s claim to have literally been to the Other World, to have actually traveled to it in the body, is a very satisfying one, even if upon close inspection it raises more questions and doubts than it answers. The immediacy of the knight’s encounter with the spiritual world likely played a role in Peter’s choice to place this vision first in his collection. Unlike dreams, ecstasies, or similar experiences, there is nothing initially hazy or questionable about what the knight saw, no chance of a mundane dream or a hallucination from illness being taken as a divine message. We have only the noble combat of a knight against

\textsuperscript{118} LR 1.1 (19vb); H. of Sawtry, \textit{Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii}, ed. Easting, 150, ll 1097-1106.

“affuit inter alios unus qui hec ita contigisse dubitare se dixit. Cui Gilbertus, ‘Sunt quidam’, inquit, qui dicunt quod aulum intrantes primo fiunt in extasi et hec Omnia in spiritu uidere. Quod omnino sibi miles ita contigisse contradicit, sed corporeis oculis se uidisse et corporaliter hec pertulisse constantissime ‘testatur’.”

\textsuperscript{119} LR 1.1 (20ra-b); \textit{Tractatus}, 150, ll 1107-28. Gilbert’s “similar” story involves demons’ physical abduction of a monk for three days and nights, who returned with visible wounds that never completely healed. The emphasis would appear to be that a direct, physical interaction between the denizens of both worlds is possible.
apparently material demonic adversaries. In the context of the *Book of Revelations*, Owein’s epistemological certainty doubtless appealed to Peter.

The reception of the *Vision of the Monk of Eynsham* illustrates how doubts of the kind explicitly counteracted by Owein’s bodily journey could arise regarding visionaries’ claims. This text is the longest single work in Book I of the *Book of Revelations*, and every leaf is neatly crossed out. In the margin, Peter tells us that he canceled this vision, after having it copied, because he had come to believe that it “could not be true.” Although he later reversed his decision, Peter’s moment of doubt has caught the attention of many later readers and provides an example of the kinds of reservations regarding visionary stories that Peter himself could have entertained. He does not tell us exactly what made him doubt, but we can get very close to what doubts surrounded the claims made by the young monk of Eynsham by studying the responses to these doubts offered by his defenders.

A faction within the monastery of Eynsham doubted the story’s truth from the beginning, and echoes of their arguments survive. Ralph of Coggeshall, in the preface to his *Visio Thurkilli*, written around 1206, mentions that a group of Edmund’s fellow monks spoke out against his vision. Ralph dismisses their criticism as an example of how “almost every revelation is doubted by some people.” An idea of what it was that led these monks at Eynsham to doubt the claims made by one of their own can be found in the *Vision of the Monk of Eynsham* itself. Adam, the

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120 LR 1.10 (32va-54va). To compare this length with other items in the collection, please consult the charts in the appendices.
121 LR 1.10 (32va) “I Peter cancelleu this vission in this book, thinking it could non esse true, but afterwaers it was proven to be most true through truthful witnesses, who knew the matter.”
122 Ralph of Coggeshall, *Visio Thurkilli*, ed. Paul Gerhard Schmidt (Leipzig: BSB B. G. Teubner Verlagsgesellschaft, 1978), 3-4. “hec iccirco dixerim, quia multi contubernalium suorum huic visioni contradicunt, sicut fere de omni revelationale a quibusdam dubitatatur.” Sharpe and Easting refer to this quotation, *Peter of Cornwall’s Book of Revelations*, 58 n. 66. Opinion at Eynsham was clearly divided, as Ralph records that Thomas of Binham, who had been prior at Eynsham when the vision took place, asserted that he did not doubt the vision’s truthfulness any more than he doubted the crucifixion.
vision’s author, appears to suggest that the main line of attack against Edmund’s claims could be
that his lengthy and debilitating illness, which prefaces the vision, had been either feigned or
greatly exaggerated. He had described how Edmund had largely recovered from this long illness
almost immediately after awaking from his two-day torpor. This amazing recovery could
obviously be miraculous; however, it could also suggest that the illness had not been as severe as
first believed. In the last chapter of the vision, Adam seems to respond to just such a suspicion:

Let them call it, if they want, a false sickness, whose explanation all the doctors’
expertise did not know! If they are more impudent, let them lie that his wickedness was
so great that his sleep was faked, who for a long time had labored under continual
insomnia [and who] was neither able to be awakened by the unexpected tones of horns
nor by the pricking of pins applied from time to time! The fraud of his deceit was so great
that with his eyes sunk deeply he seemed to have them gouged out, that he did not seem
to breathe in any way, and that he permitted the motion of his arteries after the longest
space of hours to be felt at last with the most feeble stirring. Also, for days afterwards he
cried almost incessantly!

Adam argues that Edmund’s symptoms were beyond deceit, and that they defied various tests
that had been performed during his two-day trance. The sudden loud noises and the pin pricks
that failed to rouse the young monk could be part of sincere attempts to awaken him, or even to
determine if he was still alive. They could also, however, be indicative of an immediate doubt
that Edmund really was unconscious, and attempts to test whether or not he was faking. In this
case, when his brothers came across him, in a stereotypical state for a visionary carried out of his
senses, they doubted his “excess of mind” and put it to the test. In any case this list of proofs is

123 Visio monachi de Eynsham, Cap 7, pp. 653.
124 LR 1.10 (54ra-b); Visio monachi de Eynsham, Cap. 58, pp. 731. “Verum sit tanta infidelitas, vel ut
temperantius loquar, infirmitas sit ista quorundam, ut praemissis non credant, licet talem, tantam tamque inauditam
hominis infirmitatem tam cito, tam insperacto in testimonium ostensae visionis [oculis suis] viderint curatam:
Dicant, si velint, fictam aegritudinem, cuius [rationem omnis medicorum disciplina] nescivit! Mentiantur, [si
impudentiores sunt.] tantam hominis fuisse pervicaciam, ut simulata eius dormitio sit, qui iugi prius insomnietate per
longum tempus laboraverat, non vocibus repentinis clangentium, non punctionibus adhibitis stimulorum aliquatenus
exagitari potuerit! Fuerit tanta simulationis fraudulentia, ut oculis in ima demersis effossa visus sit habere lumina,
onnismodis spirare non sit visus, arteriarum motum post longissima horarum spatial vix tandem admodum
tenuissimi fili permiserit sentiri! Lacrimas etiam postmodum per multos dies fere indesinentes irrideant!” All the
text set in brackets in Huber’s edition is present in LR. Easting also suggests that the harsh accusations made against
members of the monastery in the vision by the deceased abbot Geoffrey provided incentive to decry Edmund’s
exceedingly self-conscious, and anticipates the kinds of tests applied to female mystics in later centuries.  

This self-conscious attention to the visionary’s actual mental and physical state is present elsewhere in the *Visio*, taking up most of the first eleven chapters. Robert Easting has found the attention paid to Edmund’s physical and mental state, leading up to the vision, conspicuous. It would appear that Adam took pains to establish that the visionary was appropriately ill to allow an extra-sensory experience and that his contrition was sufficient to both warrant this experience as well as rule out any intent to deceive.

Despite all of these proofs Adam placed in the text, Peter still found the vision unbelievable, possibly after speaking to a member of the faction at Eynsham who doubted the vision. What these other specific misgivings were, over and above those alluded to in the vision itself, will remain a mystery. We do know, however, that another group of witnesses, unfortunately also anonymous, were later able to overcome these doubts, leading Peter to return to the manuscript and instruct the reader to ignore the fact that the vision is crossed out. As established in the prologue, the real issue in the genre of storytelling is whose word one trusts. The entire episode regarding the *Vision of the Monk of Eynsham* in the *Book of Revelations* remains as testimony to the fact that visions collected to assuage doubt could themselves present opportunities for doubt, and that the physical and mental state of a visionary was one particular locus for such concerns.

Peter’s abortive deletion of the *Vision of the Monk of Eynsham* provides a rare and important example of a medieval author evaluating the truth-claims made by a visionary account. His concern appears to rest with the literal truth of the young monk’s story, whether it is “true”

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125 Elliot, *Proving Woman*, 183-85. For example, Margaret of Cortona, Christine of Stommeln, and Douceline all underwent similar tests.
or not. For modern scholars concerned with distinguishing “literary” from “experiential” visions, Peter’s doubts about Edmund’s vision have something important to say. Barbara Newman has suggested that many visionary narratives as they have down to us are a complex amalgam of a visionary’s initial experience and a long heuristic process applied to this initial revelation. Like the progression outlined in the showings of Julian of Norwich, “a great deal of prayer, conversation, reading, and revision most likely intervened” between “showings.” This process was very rarely acknowledged in the final product lest such an acknowledgement weaken the authority of the whole. While the evidence in the Book of Revelations does not allow me to either confirm or deny the existence of such a process behind its contents, Peter’s remark does suggest that he would not have approved of such a process had he been made aware of it. In fact, the existence of such an evolution in the account may have actually been the objection that led him to reject the vision. As far as Peter of Cornwall and his Book of Revelations are concerned, the truth-claims expected of visionary episodes appear highly-literalistic. I believe that Peter read his stories as having literally occurred, or at least been experienced, just as described.

The source from which revelations arose served as another point of anxiety. The suspicions and disbelief surrounding the Vision of the Monk of Eynsham suggest ways that a visionary could potentially fake his experience. The material relating to dreams drawn from Gregory the Great also suggest that meaningless hallucinations arising from physical causes

\[127\] In particular, the dispute between Dinzelbacher and Siegfried Ringler in the 1980s hinged upon what, if anything, of the visionaries’ real experience can be recovered. A summary of these debates can be found in: Frank Tobin, Mechthild von Magdeburg: A Medieval Mystic through Modern Eyes (Columbia: Camden House, 1995), 115-22. My own approach largely attempts to side-step these debates, as I try to read accounts of visions and revelations as Peter of Cornwall apparently interpreted them, rather than identify what a visionary actually saw or experienced as opposed to a literary trope.

\[128\] Barbara Newman, God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 301-303. Newman suggests that we might better speak of “epiphanic” and “heuristic” visions, while acknowledging a great deal of intermingling between the two. Newman’s schema is an attempt to bridge the gap between artificial topoi and authentic experience that has dominated the German conversation.
could become confused with true divine revelations. Another possibility remains: demonic deception. The devil could appear as an angel of light, to trick the foolish.\textsuperscript{129} Augustine, as quoted in the prologue, has already raised the issue of apparitions not actually being who they appear to be, but did not elaborate this possibility to include malignant deception. While I have already stated that Peter’s texts do not broach the discernment of spirits as a theoretical issue, it does appear as a practical one, particularly in the material derived from Peter’s own friends and acquaintances. Roger, the lay brother at Stratford, initially responds to the return of his dead friend Alexander as one would to a demonic night assault. Alexander first manifests as a terrible weight upon Roger’s shoulders. After signing himself, and speaking the words, \textit{Credo in Deum}, or “I believe in God,” Roger is able to move.\textsuperscript{130} He then conjures the entity before him in the name of the Lord to leave if it serves “the enemy faction” or to identify itself if it serves God. Only after this ritualized interaction does Alexander identify himself and converse.\textsuperscript{131} Roger’s response appears to have been rehearsed ahead of time with the help of the chamberlain of the monastery. Importantly, Alexander’s later return after he completed his penance was unambiguously celestial. The return of the damned servant John to William, the priest of Lesnes, seems to follow a similar line, with the spirit needing to identify itself.\textsuperscript{132} These elements reinforce the idea that one additional factor in revelation’s delivery could be that one did not necessarily immediately know the identity of its courier.

\textsuperscript{129} 2 Cor 11:15.

\textsuperscript{130} A great weight and temporary paralysis accompanied by frightening apparitions are common experiences. Commonly, they are associated with the attacks of demons on sleeping individuals. In modern times, such experiences are often called “sleep paralysis.” For a study of such traditions see David J. Hufford, \textit{The Terror that Comes in the Night: An Experience-Centered Study of Supernatural Assault Traditions} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).

\textsuperscript{131} LR 1.205 (125ra-rb); Sharpe and Easting, 238. “‘Coniuro te,’ inquam, ‘quicquid es, in nomine Domini, ut si partis fueris aduere, nichil nocens, quantocius hinc recedas. Si uero ex parte Dei fueris, te sub uirtute nominis eius obtestor quatinus quid sis uel unde uel ad quid ueneris fideliter manifestes.” Here, the similarity to practices often associated with magic is obvious. Such conjurations appear as a standard part of human interactions with mysterious apparitions. The encounter of the tailor Snowball with a mysterious ghost is one other well-known example. M. R. James, “Twelve Medieval Ghost Stories,” \textit{The English Historical Review} 37 (1922), 415.

\textsuperscript{132} LR 1.206 (126va); Sharpe and Easting, 264.
Failure to investigate an apparition’s true identity sufficiently could have terrible consequences as seen in the story of the pilgrim on his way to the shrine of St. James. The pilgrim, a young man journeying to the saint’s shrine after committing a carnal sin, meets another pilgrim on the road. This other pilgrim engages the young man in conversation and at length reveals himself as St. James. This unprompted self-identification is a lie. The other pilgrim is, in truth, a demon. He suggests that the only way to atone for the young man’s carnal sin is to castrate and then kill himself. The unfortunate pilgrim complies and is only saved from damnation by the intervention of Mary accompanied by the real St. James, who returns the pilgrim to life, minus his virile parts. In this story, the pilgrim’s fault appears to be that he was foolishly credulous; accepting advice that he should have known no true saint would give. Indeed, the pilgrim at first protests that he knows suicide is damnable, before being overawed by the demon’s arguments. Even if the apparition appears to fit the part, some doubt or at least suspicion of its true identity seems necessary. In this story, the spiritual being identifies itself without prompting, unlike the more positive encounters above from Peter’s friends which depend on demands or conjurations on the part of the human visionaries. The experience of the Pilgrim of St. James teaches that blind faith without some reasoned scepticism is not rewarded.

Conclusion

133 LR 1.81 (84rb-85va); Alexander of Canterbury, Dicta Anselmi, 22. In R.W. Southern and F. S. Schmitt, eds. Memorials of St. Anselm (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 200-207. This story is remarkable for the ways in which the demon warps penitential philosophy, suggesting that pilgrimage without true confession will not expunge sin. This story is also notable for its discussion of suicide and can be compared to Peter’s story of the bad priest Martin in LR 1.22. This tale builds upon a tradition of similar demonic attempts to induce suicide found in accounts of the Desert Fathers, as well as the idea of an “inspiration” from the Holy Spirit to commit suicide found in biblical examples (such as Samson) and the Christian martyrs. For a discussion of these elements, see Alexander Murray, Suicide in the Middle Ages 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998-2000), esp. 1: 281-86.

134 LR 1.81 (84vb); PL 159: 338 C. “Si mihi hoc quod consulis fecero, vivere non potero, eroque mei ipsius homicida; quod saepe audivi coram Deo esse damnabile.”
In this chapter, I have approached Book I of the *Book of Revelations* through an analysis of the particular ways the invisible is rendered visible in the discourse crystalized within it. This process addresses, and to some extent repairs, a basic epistemological weakness incurred by the Fall. The general picture is one of diversity, but within this diversity unifying themes have emerged. We have seen how revelation regarding the pains and joys of the hereafter most basically and obviously is conveyed through language and storytelling. Revelatory experiences are related through a chain of storytellers and audiences leading to the text of the *Book of Revelations* itself, and it is in this way that the reader encounters it. Beyond the most obvious use of language and storytelling as a medium for knowledge about the invisible world, we have encountered ways in which the very revelations themselves, the things visionaries saw, heard and felt, could be thought of as a kind of language. Experience similar to that of the senses, the images, sounds, smells, tastes, and sensations of things, could be taken and rearranged to convey a message or particular point by a superhuman intelligence. This arrangement could come about through the activity of a spiritual power, namely God or his angels. In this sense, we have focused on how stories have been told as stories.

These revelations are experienced and described in terms taken from the regular sensory experience of human life. Sight, first and foremost, appears as the most prominent medium. Peter found experiences akin to this sense to be the most remarkable in his rubrics. Of course, a whole range of sensations beyond just sight appears in his rubrics and the excerpts themselves. Manipulated by spiritual intelligences, these sights, sounds, and sensations could be taken almost as essays meant as a form of communication, translating the spiritual into comprehensible terms. In this fashion, the sensory experience that constitutes these revelatory episodes functions like language, and just like language they demand interpretation.
Communication revealing the state of souls after death, using this language of the sensory essay noted above, often occurs when an individual’s connection to his regular senses becomes severed or frayed. In some manner, the eyes of the heart or the hidden potentialities of the soul must be activated. This stimulation is often accompanied or even caused by a reduction in the regular physiological and cognitive activities of an individual. Such a separation from regular sensory experience can be brought about through ecstasy, illness, death, and sleep. The line between these different causes is often thin or non-existent. The majority of these options are death-like, involving a separation of the mind from the activities of normal life redolent of the experience of death. Even the appearances of the dead often occur at suggestive hours, indicating the likely presence of altered states on the parts of the living visionaries.

Finally, in most of the examples presented above, the conveyance of revelation is not free from doubt and uncertainties. The weakening of regular consciousness so prominent in many of the stories in the *Book of Revelations* can be brought about by mundane physical processes. This kind of experience can also be feigned. Very likely such accusations dogged the *Vision of the Monk of Eynsham* and led Peter to doubt its truth. Likewise, in the case of *St. Patrick’s Purgatory* we have seen how the “imaginary” or spiritual nature of most of these accounts could be less vivid than one would like. Visions using images and sensations drawn from life, like a literary composition employs words, to indicate not material realities but rather unknowable incorporeal truths, could carry an aura of artificiality. They could seem less than “real.” A wide-awake visionary, seeing with the eyes of his body and not the eyes of his heart, could dispel some of the ambiguities we have identified above. The next chapter will take up and interrogate some of these possibilities.
The investigation in this chapter has identified a number of issues that bear directly upon what things or beings are actually revealed in the experiences collected by Peter of Cornwall. The most prominent of these concerns lies in the imagery and sensations that make up the majority of the visionary or revelatory experiences themselves. The images and sensations encountered by visionaries can be confected by angels, or directly by divine power, making them a kind of visual, auditory, and tactile literary construct. These experiences then use the images and sensations of regular terrestrial life to impart some indirect knowledge about the ineffable. In this case, the things revealed are not actually “seen” or encountered as they actually are. To add another level of difficulty, the constructed nature of these “imaginary” communications was potentially open to abuse or deception. When the dead appeared, it could be only their likenesses, manipulated by a spiritual intelligence. Furthermore, this spiritual intelligence could have beneficial or malignant motives. These and similar potential ambiguities and opportunities will be explored and developed in the following chapter.
Chapter 3 – The Objects of Revelation

Introduction

In the preface to his collection, Peter of Cornwall states that he has set out to compile revelations and spiritual visions in which God, his angels, and human souls “are either seen or heard.” He claims that after reading through these accounts one will not doubt the existence of these entities. At the outset, the Book of Revelations exists to demonstrate the reality of the normally invisible spiritual world. This Other World is normally indemonstrable as a result of sin. Peter, in his preface to the Book of Revelations, suggests that one common effect of indemonstrability is doubt. The last chapter focused on the conveyance of the knowledge of this invisible world, in particular the ways that it becomes sensible under special circumstances. This chapter will examine the spiritual realities made manifest by the revelations Peter collected or the actual objects of revelation.

In the discussion below, I will continue my focus on the first book in the collection, dealing primarily with the rewards and punishments awaiting the dead. As Peter explains in the prologue, this first book contains revelations that “pertain to the glory of the celestial life, or to eternal or transitory punishments.” The Book of Revelations testifies to the existence of these rewards or punishments and much more; it also bears witness to their particulars, especially regarding the type of punishments Peter terms “transitory.” These punishments of limited duration aimed to purge the dead of their sins before their entry into Heaven. The twelfth century witnessed a great expansion in access to heaven in the form of this new emphasis on purgation.

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1 LR (2ra); Sharpe and Easting, 74. “Quem librum si quis non minus oculis cordis quam corporis perlegere studuerit, Deum et angelos, et animas hominum esse, et post mortem corporis uiuere non dubitabit.”

2 LR (2va); Sharpe and Easting, 76. “Quorum primus solas illas revelationes continent, que ad gloriam celestis uite, siue ad penas eternas uel transitorias, pertinent.”
after death for minor sins. Called by some the “birth of Purgatory,” this new attention to the continuation of the human drama in the Other World opened up new spheres of interaction between the living and the dead.³ Peter does not betray a sense of novelty regarding his depictions of purgation after death, and the shape he gives to centuries of literature detailing the experiences of souls testifies to the steady evolution of locations for post-mortem purgation rather than radical novelty.⁴ Peter does appear very eager to suggest ways that Purgatorial, or transitory, punishments could be alleviated through suffrages for the dead offered by the living. These liturgical commemorations were particularly prominent in monastic communities such as those that formed the core of Peter’s social world. In these activities, the great issue explored in Peter’s collection persisted, namely the division between the spiritual and material worlds, or put differently, what can be apprehended through the senses as opposed to what cannot.

In the first half of this chapter, I will approach Peter’s revelations regarding the rewards and punishments of souls, and all the liturgical practices connected to them, first and foremost, as illustrations of normally indemonstrable phenomena. The essential problematic remains the one laid out in Peter’s preface. In the world after sin, humanity cannot know the spiritual world, and the glory of the righteous can appear as only a story, as can the sufferings of the wicked. The suffrages offered by the living to alleviate these sufferings often have no visible effects. The material in the Book of Revelations makes the spiritual manifest, demonstrating the particulars of otherworldly punishment and reward, as well as the role of the living in both.

The second half of this chapter interrogates how the same deficient human epistemology which inspires the Book of Revelations also limits its ability to convey accurately the things it reveals. Living human beings know the world through their senses, and it is through descriptions

³ Jacques Le Goff places these developments in the twelfth century and illustrates them using some of the same texts collected in the Book of Revelations; see The Birth of Purgatory and discussion in chapter one.
and sensations like those of the bodily senses that the spiritual world becomes manifest. As a result, the punishments and rewards in the Other World are described in corporeal terms. The Other World is filled with rivers, houses, mountains, and flames, and both visionaries and the dead see themselves and each other as bodies even though they travel as spirits. These corporeal descriptions do not describe spiritual things as they really are; instead, this imagery is ultimately a system of signs signifying a reality beyond the sensory experience of life. The spiritual world and God, because of the limits placed on current human knowledge, escape accurate description even in the context of revelations like those collected by Peter of Cornwall.

The essential paradox becomes that the *Book of Revelations* both reveals and conceals, but in this conflict a dynamic between doubt and faith articulates itself. The spiritual world cannot normally be encountered through the senses, and this inaccessibility opens it up to doubt. Faith exists as the immaterial connection between beings dwelling in the world of matter that is accessible through the senses and the spiritual world which cannot be encountered through the senses. In the revelations contained in Peter’s book, this spiritual world appears in various guises in response to the recurrent desire to see what is invisible, but these guises are ultimately a kind of mediation. The spiritual world is never truly encountered as it is, and Peter’s stories again and again defer a complete revelation. This deferral creates an opportunity for the reader to develop an immaterial faith to serve as a connection to the true objects of the visionary pilgrimage, objects which always escape the language and imagery of the narration.

**Part 1: Demonstrability, Doubt, and What Follows After Death**

The experience of the soul, when separate from the body, is largely a mystery to the living because it is unobservable. It is exactly this problem which Shakespeare’s Hamlet poses when he calls the “something” after death an “undiscovered country from whose bourn/ No
traveler returns,” the subject of uncertainty, doubt, and dread.\(^5\) Hamlet’s uncertainties are not far removed from sentiments entertained in the twelfth century. Peter of Cornwall’s friend or acquaintance Peter of Blois emphasizes the essentially unobservable nature of the Other World in one of his letters dealing with the terrors of death. Writing to the abbot of L’Aumône, Peter outlines the various torments that might await a sinner in the afterlife that could only be avoided through the grace of God.\(^6\) He laments that all too often men, absorbed in the matters of this life, neglect to prepare themselves to avoid the eternal fire. The soul of such a sinner after his death will exit its body and meet wicked spirits waiting to drag it down into darkness and flame, where it will never see the face of God. He ends the letter on a note reminiscent of Peter of Cornwall’s project in the *Book of Revelations*, “Woe to those who now think these things in the future that should be lamented should rather be mocked, for whom these things must first be experienced before they can be believed.”\(^7\)

Unlike Hamlet’s “undiscovered country,” travelers do return in the *Book of Revelations*, and their return acts as an antidote to the normally indemonstrable nature of life after death. The Cistercian monks of Stratford Langthorne told Peter of Cornwall stories regarding a series of agreements to return from death. The most elaborate of these stories from St. Mary’s at Stratford recounts the agreement between two monks named Roger and Alexander, who make their pact in the context of continued speculation regarding the future world. After many sessions between the two friends exploring what comes after death, Alexander suggests that the first of them to die

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\(^7\) Peter of Blois, Ep. 34, in *The Latter Letters of Peter of Blois*, 174. “Ve qui hec lugenda in posterum nunc ridenda existimant, quibus hec prius experienda sunt quam credenda.” This statement is a modification of Luke 6:25.
should return to tell the other of their fate in the afterlife.\footnote{LR 1.205 (124vb); Sharpe and Easting, 236.} Similarly, one of Peter’s parochial priests, William of Lesnes, appeared to specialize in these agreements. He repeatedly asks dying men, with whom he has likely had both personal and parochial contact, to return so they can tell him how they “fare.”\footnote{LR 1.186 (122rb); Sharpe and Easting, 260. “ut ei quomodo se haberet reuelaret.”} The unknowable nature of the something after death sets the plots of these episodes in motion, and an uncertainty borne out of this lack of knowledge leads to a desire for revelation.

Uncertainty, doubt and disbelief cluster around the unobservable nature of the punishments and rewards believed to follow death, and the revelation of these penalties and joys can dispel this doubt or uncertainty. The first vision in Peter’s collection, The \textit{Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii} or \textit{St. Patrick’s Purgatory}, portrays just such a relationship between doubt and revelation. In the vision’s prologue, the still-pagan Irish tell St. Patrick that they refuse to believe in what they cannot see:

They claimed that they would never be converted to Christ, neither through the miracles that they saw worked through him, nor through his preaching, unless something of both those torments of the wicked and the joys of the just could be observed so that they could become more certain through things they had seen than through things they had been promised.\footnote{LR 1.1 (11vb-12ra); \textit{Tractatus}, 124, ll 112-16. “dicebant se ad Christum numquam conuersuros nec pro miraculis que per eum uidebant fieri nec per eius predicationem, nisi aliquis eorum et tormenta illa malorum et gaudia bonorum posset intueri, quatinus rebus uisis certiores fieren quam promissis.”}

In response, St. Patrick prays to God, asking for some way to answer the pagans’ request. Hearing the saint’s petition, Jesus appears visibly to Patrick and gives him a text of the gospels, a staff, and reveals the location of the entrance to the Purgatory at Lough Derg. Inside the Purgatory not only could all the sins of a believer be purged but also both the joys of the just and the torments of the wicked could be seen, just as the Irish had demanded. St. Patrick’s Purgatory in Ireland specifically existed as a response to doubt that originated from the inability to observe.
This response was immediate and corporeal. The Purgatory in the cave is like the book and staff, an object readily accessible to the senses. It is a direct intersection between the world of spirit and of matter where the supposed divide between the two dissolves into a ready permeability in which the normally invisible becomes available to human sight.

St. Patrick’s reaction to the revelation of the Purgatory once again centers on the joy of seeing what normally cannot be seen. As the “apparition” of Christ disappears, Patrick not only rejoices because he will be able to make the pagan Irish see but also because he himself has seen:

And thus with the Lord disappearing from his eyes, blessed Patrick was filled with a spiritual pleasure as much for the appearance of his Lord as for the presentation of the cave.\footnote{LR 1.1 (12ra); Tractatus, 124, ll 134-37. “Sicque ab oculis eius Domino disparente iocunditate spirituali repletus est beatus Patricus tam pro Domini sui apparitione quam pro fosse illius ostensione…”}

In this case, a profound response to seeing is not only for the weak. The Lord’s attendance on Patrick represents an inversion of the usual order in which Jesus’ human, bodily form cannot be seen. In this usual order, Jesus’ human body is like the rewards and punishments waiting in the Other World: an object of belief rather than an object of certainty borne out of sensory observation. The main part of the vision, detailing the bodily descent of the knight Owein into the revealed Purgatory, will emphasize another direct meeting between spiritual objects of belief and observation through the human senses.

**Inquisitio Post Mortem: Questioning the Dead**

While St. Patrick’s Purgatory promised to grant all comers the chance to see the fate of souls, the more common avenue for knowledge of what follows death was to speak with pilgrims who had traveled there and returned. In particular, the dead, as travelers from a realm beyond regular human knowledge, are peppered with questions when they appear to the living. These questions concern their fates in the hereafter, the fates of others, and the nature of the Other
World. Questioning and answering occupy a very large amount of the text in the *Book of Revelations*, and just as Peter’s rewording in his preface of the text from Gregory’s *Dialogues* makes the reader a participant in its dialogue, so too does the reader become involved in the recurrent interrogation of the dead that surfaces in excerpt after excerpt in the collection. Even when the living travel to the Other World they question the sights that they see to such an extent that the answers constitute a running gloss. Visionaries interrogate their guides, the souls they find undergoing punishment, and the souls they encounter in paradise. Like visits from the dead to the living, the living returning from the world of the dead bear with them the answers to questions. All of these exchanges highlight the usual inability to know what follows death and the desire to overcome this limitation. The subjects of questioning are objects of belief but not of sensory knowledge, and this division between sensible and insensible energizes episode after episode.

The objects of these questions are uncertain by virtue of their unobservable nature, and this uncertainty does indeed open them up for doubt, but the extent of this doubt is difficult to gauge. This potential for doubt is itself essential in humanity’s relationship with the spiritual world because it provides the opportunity for faith. This relationship renders the interpretation of the questions posed to the dead difficult. Asking about a thing in which one believes does not necessarily indicate a crisis in one’s belief. In fact, the desire to see the objects of faith is neither strange nor calamitous, but expected. Conversely, questioning can indeed indicate an uncertainty of a different kind, less assured and more “doubtful,” bordering on disbelief.

The uncertainties exposed in these questions appear most clearly when approached in specific contexts. When the pact between Roger and Alexander, discussed above, is carried out, the still-living Roger asks his dead friend a list of questions. These questions were likely the
same ones entertained by these men as novices so many years before. He first asks Alexander to identify himself, and then inquires, “Are you yet in glory?” When he learns his friend is not yet in glory, he inquires if he has been in torments, and where he went immediately after leaving his body. He learns that Alexander was not in torments, but he cannot reveal the location of the place of souls. Alexander’s freedom from torment serves to relieve not only Roger’s worries regarding his friend’s welfare, but also suggests the efficacy of his lifestyle in securing a tolerable hereafter. Roger finishes his first question session by asking about the future fates of the abbot of his monastery and the former prior. When Alexander’s answers to these last questions come to pass, they provide visible proof in this world of his knowledge.

When Alexander appears again and reveals that he is in glory, Roger’s questions change to reflect the new knowledge he expects his friend to have. He inquires about the location of the saints, and Adam the first man. He then asks about the location of Mary and Benedict, before asking about the former abbot and another dead brother at the monastery. All of these questions address sincerely doubtful pieces of information. They constitute examples of what Sabina Flanagan, in her study of twelfth century doubt, terms things that can be licitly doubted. How is Heaven structured? Do all of the blessed congregate together despite possessing different merits and dwelling in many mansions? Do the greater saints, and especially Mary, dwell only in the sight of God? Was the old abbot saved? All of these are theological and personal questions regarding fine details, and these types of questions were likely on the minds of many contemporaries. Indeed, they read very similarly to a list of questions posed by the Abbot of

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12 LR 1.205 (125ra-126rb); Sharpe and Easting, 240-44.
Coggeshall to Peter of Blois regarding the future life. In questions like these, doubt in fundamental elements of religious belief does not appear as the main motive for questioning as opposed to a curiosity regarding details of these beliefs.

Such question and answer sessions between the living and the dead are a trope within revelation literature beyond the examples present in the *Book of Revelations*. Robert Easting has recently discussed one particularly rich example originating from the twelfth century. Gervase of Tilbury tells of how a young girl became a kind of oracle regarding the future life through her ability to converse with her dead cousin. The *Dialogue on Miracles* of Caesarius of Heisterbach is particularly rich with these kinds of dialogues not only between the living and the dead, but also between human beings and demons. In these stories, when the protagonists gain access to a spirit they begin to rather rapidly and excitedly interrogate it for information about the spiritual world, the fate of individuals after death, and the efficacy of the sacraments.

Peter the Venerable’s *On Miracles* includes a particularly memorable exchange of this type between Peter himself and William de Roanne, the recently deceased prior of Charlieu. Peter the Venerable sees the dead prior in a dream, and aware that he has little time to speak with his spirit, poses four questions. He first inquires about how William fares. After the prior responds that he fares well, Peter asks if he sees God even now. William replies that he continually sees God. Peter then asks if “what we believe regarding God is true, and is the true faith, which we hold, without doubt?” The prior responds that there is “nothing so true.” Finally, Peter poses the veridical question, asking if it is indeed true that he was murdered. William

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14 Revell, *The Later Letters of Peter of Blois*, Ep. 29, 146-56. The letter is dated 1200x11. This may have been the same abbot of Coggeshall (Thomas) who provided Peter with chapter 1.187 of the LR, or it may be his successor Ralph.
15 Easting, “Dialogue between a clerk and the spirit of a girl.”
16 Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia imperialia*, 3.103.
17 In one example, a possessed woman answers questions regarding the fates of dead individuals, and the efficacy of the sacraments, including the real presence. Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus miraculorum*, 5.29.
answers that he was, and when the murderer later confesses, the truth of the dream is demonstrated.\(^\text{18}\)

The interpretation of Peter’s questions highlights a number of irresolvable ambiguities. His inquiries can be read as indicating a deep anxiety, one even bordering upon a panic, in the basic tenets of his religion.\(^\text{19}\) I believe that such a reading is possible, but that it is far from the only one present. As Peter of Blois and the author of the prologue to *St. Patrick’s Purgatory* have observed, hard doubt, as disbelief, attends upon the indemonstrability of the invisible, spiritual world. Gervase of Tilbury, for example, offers his question and answer story as a direct rebuttal to those who refuse to take seriously things that have not been observed.\(^\text{20}\) On the contrary, as the questions shared between Roger and Alexander have also demonstrated, the particular characteristics of this normally unknown world remain mysterious and questionable even if one is secure in one’s belief in its existence and basic rules. When Peter the Venerable asks if what “we” believe about God and the faith are true, he may be primarily referencing a whole host of particular minor issues and fine details regarding the deity and the faith that he knew were shared between Prior William and himself, such as the fine questions Roger waited so long for Alexander to answer. Indeed, posing such a question may be a cathartic expression of overwhelming confidence in a potentially doubtful set of propositions, rather than a sign of panic.\(^\text{21}\)


\(^{20}\) Gervase, *Otia*, 3.103, 758. “Multociens et a multis insultatur, cum penas infernales ante oculos ponimus, quod ea que de altero seculo proponimus friuola sunt, adicientes hec adimuenticia esse, non ergo credunt… nisi audrient ad aliquo qui uel resurrexerit a mortuis uel uiuentibus appareat post mortem.”

\(^{21}\) Dominique Iogna-Prat, *Order and Exclusion*, 360. Sabina Flanagan suggests that what can be taken as signs of increasingly radical doubt in the works of Peter the Venerable could just as easily indicate “growing confidence in taking on all comers,” *Doubt in an Age of Faith*, 174.
The doubts expressed and assuaged in these questions and answers are best imagined as working in multiple places along a continuum. These answers address both profound, fundamental uncertainties and what may be termed “niggling” doubts concerned with fine details, and anything in between. Indeed, the exploration of extreme cases through such “niggling questions” can indicate the elaboration of a systematic understanding like that pursued in the schools.²² In such an approach, larger elements of the system are often implied through seemingly innocuous and overly-specific questions regarding particulars. To return one last time to Roger and Alexander, Alexander’s appearance could indeed demonstrate something as fundamental as the survival of the soul. His freedom from torments and entry into blessedness could also demonstrate the validity and results of his monastic vocation and the prayers offered up for his soul by his brethren. Finally, the direct questions he answers provide Roger with very well-informed opinions regarding finer details of the experience and ordering of Heaven and the fate of individual souls in relation to their actions in life.

I suggest that a reader should approach all of the revelations contained in the Book of Revelations of Peter of Cornwall as working along a scale of uncertainties like these ghostly questioning sessions. Although one particular episode may stress one or more individual points over others, a whole host of linked beliefs are always present indirectly. This multilayered system of messages exists as a particularly prominent expression of the dissemination of systematic scholastic thinking into the wider society of the twelfth century. In particular, these stories can be read as a series of extreme cases, illustrating ideas in a manner parallel to the scholastic questions explored in the schools.

The ways that Peter’s stories illustrate many points at once as well as the ways that they can reveal the dissemination of theological ideas prominent in the schools will be familiar to students of medieval exempla literature. The exemplum, or short didactic story, assumed its medieval form around the time or shortly after Peter compiled the *Book of Revelations*. The exemplum came to define the great evangelical projects of the thirteenth century, especially in the hands of Cistercian, Franciscan and Dominican preachers. These preachers most famously used exempla to demonstrate theological doctrines and appropriate religious behaviors to the laity in their sermons. Before its use with lay audiences, however, the exemplum was perfected in the cloister, particularly among the Cistercians. One can see how the excerpts collected in the *Book of Revelations* could easily be taken and used as exempla to illustrate a variety of points. Peter’s collection belongs at the forefront of the developments that would go on to produce many exempla both used in later sermons and present in later collections such as that of Caesarius of Heisterbach. The Cistercian connections and influences that color so much of the material, such as the stories from Stratford Langthorne, further testify to close cultural and literary ties between Peter of Cornwall’s text and the development of the exemplum as a genre.

With these essential caveats in mind, the discussion can now turn to some of the beliefs and practices that find special, and repeated, demonstrations in the collection. In particular, the selections Peter made for texts to include in his collection often relate to areas of soteriology under development in the course of the long twelfth century, or to experiences especially important in the course of monastic life. Peter’s selections pay close attention to the moments just before and after death, the effects of penance and contrition, the efficacy of suffrages offered for the dead, and the natures of the punishments and rewards awaiting souls. The punishments in

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23 The discussion below is drawn from Claude Bremond, Jacques le Goff, and Jean-Claude Schmitt, *L’”Exemplum, ”* Typologie des sources du Moyen Âge 40 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1982).

24 Caesarius’ collection (1219-22) is often labelled as the first true “exempla collection.”
the hereafter and the effect of suffrages for the dead often appear together, testifying to the effect of these actions by the living.

**Death and Its Ministers**

The moment of death constitutes the limit of observation when the movements of the body cease to give indirect testimony to the existence of the soul. The end of mortal life constituted a moment of truth, where not only the actuality of life after death appeared to the newly dead, but also the fine details of that life. The friends and family of the departed could not normally share in this revelation. For them, the spirit animating the body would be indirectly evident one moment, through the movements of the body, and utterly absent the next, and it is here that the need for demonstration of the persistence of the soul arises.

Indeed, the final death throes, witnessed by those gathered around the dying, form a kind of juncture between the demonstrable and the indemonstrable. The dying, in their movements, can betray that they have become privy to phenomena unknown to the living. As a result, the living naturally wonder what these phenomena are, and what they portend for the fate of the newly dead in the Other World. The death of Bernard of Clairvaux’s uncle, Waldric, appears to have raised precisely these kinds of questions. While dying, Waldric makes a series of motions and expressions indicative of great terror, before becoming suddenly placid the instant before death. To onlookers, it might appear that he had seen his punishments awaiting him as he left his body. To remove this ambiguity, Waldric returns from the dead to explain that he had indeed seen two wicked spirits ready to cast him down into a well “of horrible depth,” but that St. Peter

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25 The excerpt from *Dialogues* 4.5.1-3 used in Peter’s prologue, LR (3rb), situates the moment of death in exactly these terms. See discussion in chapter 2.

26 LR 1.60 (78va-b); Alan of Auxerre, *Vita secunda S. Bernardi*, 12.37. PL 185: 490 D. This uncle was also known as Gaudry lord of Touillon, who was one of Bernard’s first converts. He had two sons who became monks at Molesme and at least two daughters who became nuns. Constance Brittain Bouchard, *Sword, Miter, and Cloister: Nobility and the Church in Burgundy, 980-1198* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 336. William of St. Thierry, *Vita prima S. Bernardi*, 1.10, PL 185: 232.
himself appeared and drove them off before they could do any harm. Similarly, one of the Marian stories in the *Book of Revelations* recounts how a dying monk “let out horrible screams.” Following such a bad death, his brothers doubted his salvation. Like Waldric, this monk returns from the dead to explain that he had screamed because demons had indeed come for his soul, but that Mary had freed him from them and secured him in his rest.27

Stories like those involving Bernard’s uncle and the screaming monk build upon the wide-spread belief that the dying can see the spirits dispatched to receive their soul in the moments before death. These spiritual emissaries, one of the first if not the very first “sights” a dying Christian could expect to encounter after they left their bodies, represented the initiation of the newly dead human being into the Other World. Roger and Alexander indicate that these “officials or ministers” that received souls were the topic of a fair amount of their speculation about the next world when they agree that the first to die must describe them.28 Not only would the arrival of these ministers finally demonstrate the existence of life after death, but their appearance alone could be quite terrifying. In an excerpt from the *Life of Winwaloe*, a disciple of the saint resuscitates his mother after he discerns her spirit still lingering within her limbs. When she returns, she describes the demonic emissaries who arrived for her soul before she returned to life. Just as she breathed her last, she saw around her “little extremely black men like icy coal prepared to devour me.” As they devour her, they bind her. This binding and devouring appears to coincide with her progressive separation from the flesh. As it seemed to her, they next snatched her up, dragging her by her feet towards places of even harsher punishments. They never reach this final destination with their prize. Saint Winwaloe, answering his disciple’s

27 LR 1.177 (117va-118ra); *Miracles of the Virgin*. Mussafia, *Studien*, 2.37 (39), 44. This information secures the monk’s burial in hallowed ground.
28 LR 1.205 (124vb); Sharpe and Easting, 236. “qualiter de hac uita decesserit, et hinc migrans a qualibus officialibus uel ministris susceptus fuit.”
prayers, intervenes and by his command, backed by “the divine imperium,” the demons relinquish her soul.  

Those imagining what they would experience after death expected foul spirits to receive the souls of the wicked and good angels to take up the souls of the just, but an individual’s assignment to one group or the other can be influenced through devotional activities. As in the case of Bernard’s uncle or the disciple’s mother, demons often try to ensnare a soul that is ultimately destined for Heaven, and the ways in which these fallen angels are denied the souls that they seek reveals a major theme that runs through a great many of the individual items in the Book of Revelations. In the initial confrontations of the newly dead with the fallen angels sent to take their souls, past devotion to a particular saint as well as the prayers of the living prove decisive. St. Peter himself appears to defend Bernard’s uncle, the screaming monk finds his protector in Mary, and the disciple’s mother is delivered by St. Winwaloe. These advocates are in many cases the saints to whom these individuals directed their prayers in life.

In these stories, the efficacy of individuals’ prayers and the dedication displayed to particular saints make themselves manifest, in contrast to the usual course of events in which these results cannot be seen. In the context of revelation, these invisible effects become sensible. This presentation of the usually invisible extends to many liturgical and devotional practices beyond petitions to saints and prayers. Many of these actions bear a strong connection to the transitory punishments that existed in the Other World, and emphasize the roles of individuals in the drama of the hereafter. Rather than a simple catalogue of effects arising ex opere operato, the inner states that accompany action are repeatedly stressed, particularly as they relate to access to eventual salvation.

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29 LR 1.37 (71rb); Wurdisten of Landevennec, *Vita S. Winwaloei*, 2.22. ed. Smedt, 234.
Penance and Contrition

Penance and contrition take centre stage among the normally indemonstrable phenomena showcased in the *Book of Revelations*. The centrality of these two concepts bears a strong connection to the prominence of the type of otherworldly punishments Peter of Cornwall termed “transitory.” Time and again, visionaries are threatened with their due punishments, but as an act of mercy returned to life. By this act, they are given an opportunity to mend their ways and avoid the fates they had glimpsed or briefly experienced. These stories illustrate important theological points regarding human soteriology. Of primary importance is the notion that contrition and appropriate penance are only effective during life. The “window” in which to make amends for sin slams shut at the moment of death. After death, purgatorial punishments can cleanse those still laden with minor faults, but they cannot redeem those who have died burdened by mortal sin. True contrition and confession can tilt the balance even at the last instant, shifting an individual from the ranks of the damned into those who will undergo purgation before an eventual entry into heaven.

The idea that a majority of Christians could achieve salvation through appropriate contrition during life and a penance largely performed after death gained enormous ground in the twelfth century. C. S. Watkins has suggested that visions and ghost stories constitute excellent guide posts from which to track the dissemination of new penitential philosophies. He outlines a shift in conceptions of penance in the twelfth century that entailed a movement from a daunting penance during life that aimed to counter all post-mortem punishment to a system of purgation that lay mostly in the spiritual world after death.30 Visions and ghost stories testify to the validity of post-mortem purgation by demonstrating it first-hand, and often feature the conversion of

skeptics in the efficacy of acts of restitution and suffrages for the dead into believers.\textsuperscript{31} Peter’s excerpts will serve similar ends, but, beyond Watkins’ suggestions, the \textit{Book of Revelations} also demonstrates how the penitential developments he outlines can be made to fit seamlessly into sources from the older tradition that he claims was largely superseded.

The stories testify to the effectiveness of true repentance, and its ability to move individuals from the damned into the company of those who will be eventually redeemed. The two episodes drawn from Gregory’s \textit{Dialogues} that feature dragons devouring a dying monk can be read to illustrate this point. In one, the monk cries out that the dragon has come to devour him because of his sin. The other brothers fervently pray for him and drive the dragon off. The monk does not immediately die; instead, he lives for quite some time, mindful of his conduct and its repercussions.\textsuperscript{32} The other story presents the opposite outcome. A monk who had secretly eaten during his fasts is dying and finds himself in a dragon’s jaws. He has time to announce his fault, but not enough to do true penance. The dragon, which he sees, kills him too quickly.\textsuperscript{33} The difference between these two episodes is that in one a vision prompts a change of life for the visionary, while in the other the visionary’s account benefits only others. What enables this difference is the extra time given to pursue penance to the first monk as opposed to the second. These and similar stories illustrate and testify to the reality of both the potential penalties for dying in a state of serious sin, as well as the ways these penalties can be avoided.

Peter’s story of the bad priest Martin illustrates the results of false, or incomplete, penance. Martin, the parochial priest at the chapel of All Hallows on the Cellars in London, brings about the suicide of the wife of Roger Bat through his negligence. Initially, Martin is

\textsuperscript{31} Watkins suggests that this conversion into a believer is a prominent component of the \textit{Vision of Walchelin}, “Sin, Penance and Purgatory in the Anglo-Norman Realm,” 11.
\textsuperscript{32} LR 1.125 (100va-101ra); Gregory, \textit{Dialogues}, 4.40.1-5.
\textsuperscript{33} LR 1.127 (101rb-101va); Gregory, \textit{Dialogues}, 4.40.10-12.
extremely remorseful that the woman’s soul was lost due to his sloth. This remorse does not lead to an appropriate change of life, and Martin remains a neglectful priest. He continues to live with a mistress and even has sons and daughters with her. While dying, Martin realizes his peril, lamenting that he “ever accepted the name and duty of a priest.” His sordid life and most of all the preventable suicide of Roger’s wife drag him to damnation. At his death, the priest’s punishment is symbolized by the sudden appearance of a large number of ravens.

William, the priest of Lesnes, tells another story involving penance, but this penance is joined to the need for confession before death. As William’s servant, a young man of around twenty years of age named John, lies dying, he promises to return and tell the priest of his fate. He later appears and reveals that he burns “in the inferno” for his secret crime of breaking his oath by stealing from Holy Trinity Priory, the mother church of Lesnes. The priest asks, “again and again if he was in that inferno without hope of salvation.” John confirms that indeed he resides in that inferno “without any hope of escape” because he is damned. William’s question is very revealing. He wonders if John could be undergoing purgatorial punishments. These purgatorial punishments would present the hope of eventual escape and entry into blessedness. John’s punishments, unfortunately, are not purgatorial because he neither confessed his crime, nor attempted restitution before death. In this tale, confession to a priest after death is useless, only confession before the end of life works to expunge sin.

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34 LR 1.20 (65va); Sharpe and Easting, 288. “Cumque in crastino hoc oculata fide sacerdoti innotuit, magno nimirum dolore affectus fuit. Sed tamen uitant et mores non correxit sicut debutit.”
35 LR 1.20 (65va); Sharpe and Easting, 288. “Ve mihi misero! Quod umquam nomen uel officium sacerdotis accepi. Nam misera et sordida uita mea, et maxime illa femina, que per negligentiam meam se suspendit, me modo ad damspanationem trahit.”
36 LR 1.206 (126va); Sharpe and Easting, 264. “quesuiit iterum atque iterum si in ipso inferno esset sine spe salvationis. Cui ille repondit, se illic esse sine spe aliqua euasionis.”
Suffrages for the Dead

Once an individual has merited “transitory punishments” to purge minor faults before entry into Heaven, the length and severity of this purgation could be influenced by the actions of the living. Once again, the stories found in the Book of Revelations provide demonstrations of the efficacy of these suffrages. In the normal sequence of events, the prayers, masses and other actions offered up for the souls of the dead would be accompanied by no direct signs that the departed had benefitted from them. Peter’s revelations directly redress this state of affairs, often in very specific ways.

One of the Marian tales Peter recorded stands in stark contrast to that of John, the servant of William of Lesnes. It recounts how a sinful priest not only avoids damnation for his wrongs, but also speeds through otherworldly purgation with the assistance of a living friend. This bad priest never allowed his duties to restrain him from his desires, including the seduction of nuns. While dying, however, he confesses to a friend, conveniently also a priest, who sings one mass a day for a year on behalf of his friend’s soul. At year’s end, Mary appears to the still-living priest while singing the secret of the mass, and tells him that his prayers have brought about his friend’s freedom from otherworldly torments. Mary then shows the living priest his dead friend standing beside him, “lest you doubt what has been said.”37 In this case, a sincere, last-minute repentance, aided by determined liturgical remembrance by the living, shortened what by all logic would otherwise have been a lengthy and terrible otherworldly purgation. This purgation itself was only made possible by the act of confession before death. The faithful friend, through a

37 LR 1.178 (118ra-119ra); Miracles of the Virgin. “Atque adeo inquit ne dubites de dicto, uide socium absolutum astare lateri tuo.” It is often titled, “Prayers of a Friend.” Like the other Marian miracles in LR, this story appears in other collections of the Miracles of the Virgin in the British Library, Royal 6B. xiv. (85b). It also appears in what I have posited to be the closer exemplar to Peter’s text, Toulouse 482. Ward, Catalogue of Romances in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum (London: Printed by Order of the Trustees, 1961), 638.
special gift from the Virgin, sees that both his friend’s timely confession and his own masses offered up in his friend’s name have worked.

In the last chapter, I noted that the appearances of the dead, especially among the Cistercians at Stratford Langthorne, often correspond to their liturgical commemorations. The dead, in particular, appear around the end of the tricenary, or the thirty-day period of commemoration for the dead. Roger and Alexander’s list of three possible times to appear: the day of death, one month after death, or one year after death, is really a list of major commemorations for the departed. Immediately after death, the litany would be spoken over the corpse. Special prayers for the deceased would continue for the next thirty days, or the 
*tricenarium*, and finally all of the year’s dead would be absolved at the yearly meeting of the General Chapter. Beyond this yearly absolution, monk priests could look forward to twenty masses within the year following their deaths.38

The appearances at Stratford demonstrate the efficacy of all of these suffrages for the dead highlighted by Roger and Alexander’s potential return dates. One monk returns from the dead to relate that he suffered in Purgatory for no longer than it took to speak the litany over his corpse.39 A lay brother appears to the monk who cared for him during his final illness around thirty days after his death. He explains that he remains in punishments, but that he will “most certainly” be freed after the thirtieth day, because no Cistercian can remain in Purgatory beyond thirty days, unless bound by a criminal fault. Even if a Cistercian bears such a fault, he will be freed from Purgatory after his absolution at the General Chapter at the end of the year, provided he confessed before death.40

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38 *Ecclesiastica officia*, 98.47-51.
39 LR 1.201 (123rb); Sharpe and Easting, 230.
40 LR 202 (123rb-va); Sharpe and Easting, 230, 232.
The Punishment of Souls

In addition to demonstrating how otherworldly punishment could be avoided or reduced, many items from the Book of Revelations also describe these punishments in great detail, along with detailed explanations of their causes. Far from being a simple catalogue of horrors, the torments of souls testify to the results of actions. When a visionary describes the penalties for sin found in the Other World, cause and effect are brought together in a way unlike that found in normal life. Just as the still-pagan Irish complained to St. Patrick, the results of sin in the next life are invisible in the course of this one. As in the case of St. Patrick’s Purgatory, revelations redress this invisibility, and make actions in this life and their results in the next not only visible but, to a certain extent, co-existent. In this context, sin has a very real price and the living are all the more motivated to avoid it, and act to lessen the experience of it on behalf of their dead relatives and friends.

The visceral horror of many of these descriptions is important. Part of the revelation of otherworldly torments is the removal of abstraction. The description of specific and awful types of torture renders the punishments after death comprehensible. The detailed descriptions of these terrors have often been open to ridicule. In particular, modern commenters have questioned the suitability of such descriptions for meditations on the nature of the next life, and whether God would choose to multiply bodily tortures known from this world in the next.41 What such familiar and detailed portrayals do accomplish, however, is to bring the punishments of the wicked into the sphere of the familiar and the knowable; they move precisely because of their viscerality and what one might term their “baseness.”

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41 For an example of some discussions of this nature in modern evangelical circles, see John Sanders, “Hell Yes! Hell No! Evangelical Debates on Eternal Punishment,” in Hell and Its Afterlife: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives, ed. Isabel Moreira and Margaret Toscano (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), 138-46.
Fire stands foremost among all the attributes of otherworldly torment. Two sources that Peter found likened Hell and its fires to the volcanoes of Sicily. Gregory the Great observed that Sicily possessed “more open pits burning with fires from Hell than any other region.” Like St. Patrick’s Purgatory in Ireland, God had made these literal openings into Hell on the surface of the earth to correct doubters: “Unbelievers who had heard of the torments of Hell and still refused to believe were to see these realms of torture with their own eyes.”

An excerpt from the Life of St. Nicholas discusses the properties of volcanic flame found near Myra, and how it visibly demonstrates the qualities of hellfire. In particular, this flame burns eternally but does not consume what it torments. The appearance of flame could symbolize the entirety of damnation.

In an excerpt taken from the Life of Columbanus, a ball of flame shaped like a disk appears over the graves of two apostate nuns for three years. When their sepulchres are opened after six months of this, the corpses are completely consumed and the graves blackened by fire.

Flames, or fiery objects, play central roles in the more memorable torments in the long visions in the collection. The vision of Ailsi, Peter’s grandfather, and St. Patrick’s Purgatory both feature flaming rivers and super-heated bathhouses, among many other fiery things. In St. Patrick’s Purgatory, this river of fire is the entrance to the real Hell, as opposed to the places of

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42 LR 1.119(98vb); Gregory, Dialogues, 4.36.11-12, 122; 235-6. “Quod omnipotens Deus ad correctionem uiuentium in hoc mundo uoluit ostendi, ut mentes infidelium, que inferni tormenta esse non credunt, tormentorum locauideant, quaeaudita credere recusant.”  
43 LR 1.54 (76va-b); John the Deacon, Vita sancti Nicolai, 2. “Veniet enim veniet certe dies illa, quando et tu et tuus, diabolus, aeterno dampnabimini incendio, cuius similitudinem ignis prefate urbis habet, qui ardet et non penitus exurit.” Peter’s version, transcribed here, has numerous small differences to the published edition: Boninus Mombruti, ed., Sanctuarium seu vitae sanctorum, vol. 2 (Paris: Fontemoing, 1910), 297. Sicily also provided a possible, though ultimately unsuccessful, location for the purgation of souls as well as their punishment for damnation. Le Goff terms this possibility “the Sicilian effort,” see Le Goff, The Birth of Purgatory, 201-208.
44 LR 1.49 (74vb-75ra); Jonas of Bobbio, Vita S. Columbani, 2.19. MGH, SRM, 4 (1902), 139-40. This excerpt is part of a string of stories regarding the nuns of Evoriacus (1.46-50), and is the only place in the first book of the LR where women (with the exception of the Virgin) take center stage of any prolonged period. These stories have been translated in the entirety in Jo Ann McNamara and John E. Halborg, trans. Sainted Women of the Dark Ages (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 161-75. This tale is found on 171-73. Peter includes another story very similar to this one from Gregory’s Dialogues, LR 1.115 (97rb-97va); Gregory, Dialogues, 4.33.
purgation, and must be crossed over by a narrow bridge.\textsuperscript{45} In Ailsi’s vision, the vast fiery house, includes heated irons and chains that “burnt, pricked, and tortured” the “members by which a man had sinned,” advocates and liars hang by their tongues, thieves and murderers suffer through their hands, while adulterers and effeminate suffer through their genitals.\textsuperscript{46} In the various spaces of torment detailed in \textit{St. Patrick’s Purgatory}, a similar system of fitting punishments emerges.\textsuperscript{47}

The punishments revealed in the Other World consist of much more than flames, or even heated objects. Following in the vein of the \textit{Vision of Drythelm}, extremes of cold in the form of unimaginably frigid wind and ice often accompany torments marked by their heat.\textsuperscript{48}

Punishments, as they were in Ailsi’s fiery house, often are tailored to “fit the crime,” highlighting or even re-enacting the sins that prompted them committed during life. In one example, the penalty for sodomy shown to the monk of Eynsham is repeated rape by monstrous beasts.\textsuperscript{49} In these cases, the sinful are literally trapped and held within the physical actions of their sins, or held by the body parts by which they engaged in sin, and every detailed torment that is enumerated becomes a theatrical object-lesson.

One example from the \textit{Vision of the Monk of Eynsham} brings many of the elements discussed in this section together. Edmund sees the soul of a goldsmith he knew in life immersed in torments. The goldsmith is thrown into a heap of burning money, forced to swallow the heated coins, and to count them while they burn his fingers. The goldsmith suffers this torment because he defrauded his customers, moved by the threat of poverty in the early phase of his career.\textsuperscript{50} The goldsmith explains that he is fortunate to suffer this penalty because it is purgatorial. After a

\textsuperscript{45} LR 1.1 (15va-vb); \textit{Tractatus}, 135-36, ll 537-75.
\textsuperscript{46} LR 1.6 (27ra-b); Sharpe and Easting, 206.
\textsuperscript{47} In particular, a super-heated bathhouse LR 1.1 (14vb-15ra); \textit{Tractatus}, 133-34, ll 465-87.
\textsuperscript{48} LR 1.12 (57rb); Bede, \textit{Historia}, 12.
\textsuperscript{49} LR 1.10 (41vb); \textit{Visio monachi de Eynsham}, 25.
\textsuperscript{50} LR 1.10 (40va); \textit{Visio monachi de Eynsham}, 21, 675.
night of heavy drinking, he had neglected to rise for Matins. A demon, who had often tempted him into drunkenness in the past, took this negligence as a perfect opportunity to ensure that the smith died in sin and strangled him. In the moment before death, the smith in his mind beseeched St. Nicholas, and vowed that he would make a “pure, faithful, and complete confession” for all his sins and that he would “completely give up forever the vice of drunkenness.” This moment of true contrition paired with the formation of the intent to make a full confession took only an instant, but this time was enough to move the goldsmith from the category of the damned to the redeemable. When the demon carried his soul off into the Other World, Nicholas appeared and ripped the smith’s spirit out of the demons’ hands and took it to the purgatorial torments of the coins where Edmund found him. In the goldsmith’s torment and in its presentation his actions in this world and their results in the next become one, almost as if two halves have been brought together through the mediation of the visionary and the narrative he brings back with him.

This story illustrates a number of points regarding the horrors of otherworldly punishment, the effects of contrition and penance before death, and the value of saintly patronage. The goldsmith’s punishments fit his crimes. In the Other World, he suffers through the things that he loved in life which have been turned against him. In particular, his case reminds the reader of the dangers of sudden death for those burdened by sin, and how the regular invisibility of these perils can lead to damnation. The living, mindful of only the things that they can see and experience in the present life, can neglect to prepare for the future they cannot encounter at present. The goldsmith had the instant for penance, but others may not, as he warns Edmund: “Certainly, if I knew, while I was in the world, what I only know now, I would have

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51 LR 1.10 (40rb); Visio monachi de Eynsham, 21, 675. “in mente uoui, quod puram, fidelem, et integram de omnibus peccatis meis facerem confessionem et ebrietatis uitium omnimodis in aeternum abdicarem.”
52 LR 1.10 (40rb); Visio monachi de Eynsham, 21, 675. “Verum ad huiusmodi deliberationem momentaneum mihi uix spatium indulgebatur… in ictu oculi sedibus suis euulsum de corpore spiritum [demon] eiecit.”
fortified the entire world against it….” Edmund now can carry the goldsmith’s current knowledge back to the living, many of whom, just as the goldsmith once did, live their lives focused only on what they currently see and what they currently know.

The Rewards of the Just

While of less interest than the punishments of the wicked to many modern readers, the rewards that awaited the just in the Other World arguably enjoyed pride of place among Peter and his contemporaries. These rewards appear in the collection in a host of guises. Foremost among these is the terrestrial paradise, or the lost Garden of Eden, which humanity left as a result of original sin. In St. Patrick’s Purgatory, the knight Owein makes his way to this place, separated from the places of punishment by a great wall. It is filled with a wondrous odor and all manner of bountiful plants and sunshine. The men he meets there explain to the knight that souls cross over into this paradise after they have passed through the purgatorial punishments that he has just seen. They remain in this place of rest until they are worthy to pass into the direct presence of God. After this explanation, the knight is sent back into the regular world having seen both “the torments of the wicked and the joys of the just” with his own eyes, as the ancient Irish had requested.

This idea of a progression for souls through places of punishments to one of rest features prominently in many of the major visions in the collection. The prominence of this motif has served as a guideline for scholars charting the development of the idea of Purgatory. Le Goff argues that such a scheme took time to develop and is commonly found only in the twelfth century onward. Earlier visions feature places of punishment and of rest but do not often

53 LR 1.10 (40vb); Visio monachi de Eynsham, 22, 676. “‘O,’ inquit, ‘profecto si scissem, cum eram in saeculo, quod scio modo, totum mundum contra hoc muniisse….’”
54 LR 1.1 (18ra-va); Tractatus, 143-44.
55 Le Goff, Birth of Purgatory, 133-34.
specify how one moves, or if one moves, from one to the next. Whatever the particular issues with Le Goff’s argument may be, Peter’s most recent visions proudly feature such a system for movement between the places of purgation and of rest, and it is not at all difficult to read his older texts, such as the *Vision of Drythelm*, as describing a similar situation in less detail. The very compatibility between the early and contemporary sources Peter included speaks eloquently in favor of the gradual evolution of attitudes regarding penance after death, and the systematization of these ideas in the twelfth century.²⁶ Edmund of Eynsham makes his way through various punishments to a field of flowers, filled with light and rejoicing souls.²⁷ Peter’s own grandfather, Ailsi, followed an itinerary similar to Owein’s at St. Patrick’s Purgatory, traveling through the places of punishment until he reached a paradise in which the souls of the blessed wait for their chance to see God.²⁸ These otherworldly rewards await the souls who pass through their purgation and because of these purgatorial or transitory punishments the joys of paradise are potentially available to the regular faithful who left life less than immaculate.

The process of purgation in the Other World, which leads to paradise, is in direct, if often invisible, contact with the actions of the living, and souls in paradise testify to this link. The souls Owein meets in paradise stress the importance and effectiveness of suffrages for the dead. Souls do not know how long they will bear the horrific punishments they are subjected to after death according to their own merits; however, through the “masses, psalms, prayers, and alms” offered up for them, “their torments are mitigated or transformed into lighter and more tolerable ones.” If these services are diligent enough, they can liberate souls “entirely” from their

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²⁶ Graham Robert Edwards suggests that twelfth-century depictions should be approached in this spirit, rather than as a “revolutionary” development explained by “quasi-sociological theories” as Le Goff has done: “Purgatory: ‘Birth’ or Evolution?” 642.
²⁷ LR 1.10 (51ra-b); *Visio monachi de Eynsham*, 49, 720-21.
²⁸ LR 1.6 (27vb-28rb); *Visions of Ailsi and His Sons*, 210, 212.
purgatorial punishments. Just as Owein’s testimony demonstrates the existence of punishments after death for sin, so too does it illustrate the ways in which these punishments can be alleviated and eventually entirely ended by the actions of the living.

The paradise visited by Owein, Drythelm, Edmund, Ailsi, and others is a worldly one, filled with the types of pleasant things known from the experience of normal life. These visionaries report walls, precious stones, trees, and rivers, and meet souls enjoying them who all appear as living women and men. Of course, the odors, colors, sounds, and beauty of these familiar objects and places are greatly enhanced from anything found in the living world, but the general template remains one drawn from life. Just as the punishments for souls are described in graphic terms drawn from the violence visited upon bodies in the current world, so too are the descriptions of the rewards for those who have escaped those punishments taken from the pleasant things of this world. The familiar nature of these terrors and joys, as they are revealed, plays a key role in their demonstration. In these visions and revelations, the Other World becomes sensible and appears as phenomena and objects accessible to the powers of the senses, but in this very familiarity lies a profound complication: the dead possess no bodies and no bodily senses with which to know material things.

**Part 2: A World Made of Images**

Up to now, I have explored the ways that the spiritual world is described in the *Book of Revelations*. In the visions and other revelations it contains, the geography, contents and inhabitants of this Other World have been described in terms like those used for the regular world: good angels have appeared as men; the dead mainly return looking as they did in life; hell

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59 LR 1.1 (18rb), *Tractatus*, 144. “Eorum uero qui in penis sunt nullus nout quamdiu torquebitur. Per missas autem et psalmos et orationes et elemosinas, quotiens pro eis fiunt, aut eorum tormenta mitigantur aut in minora et tolerabilia transferuntur, donec omnino per talia beneficia liberentur.”
and Paradise appear as places, filled with apparently material objects such as rivers, trees and cauldrons. Throughout these descriptions, however, Peter’s sources have suggested that these appearances should not be taken completely at face value. These recurrent suggestions, regarding the nature of the other world, when paired with the theoretical discussions familiar to Peter’s contemporaries, suggest that the way visionaries describe the hereafter is, largely, symbolic.\(^\text{60}\) The following section explores how this symbolism complicates our understanding of what is actually revealed in the *Book of Revelations*.

In this section, I explore how the places, beings, and objects encountered by visionaries in the Other World are mostly incorporeal images that act as signs signifying spiritual realities. As Peter explained through the words of Gregory’s *Dialogues* in his preface, living human beings, as an effect of original sin, cannot directly know spiritual things, such as the soul, in a manner like they know bodily things through the senses.\(^\text{61}\) As a result, revelations do not convey the spiritual world as it really is. Likewise, the souls of the dead, at least initially, utilize the same limited and imperfect ways of knowing familiar to the living. A true encounter with spiritual things would not use corporeal imagery, and the eventual transcendence of corporeal imagery exists as one of the goals of both visionaries, who traveled outside their bodies, and the souls of the dead, separated from their bodies by death. Corporeality would return at the Resurrection, but the nature of humanity’s engagement with it would be radically transformed. Just as humanity was not destined to exist forever in a bodiless state, the Other World itself was not totally incorporeal. The section ends with a consideration of how incorporeal images and corporeal bodies converge in *St. Patrick’s Purgatory*, the first vision included in Peter’s *Book of*

\(^{60}\) In my use of the word, “symbolic,” I mean it in the colloquial, modern sense, and not the various sacramental senses found in medieval authors’ works, or those of the fathers.

\(^{61}\) LR (2vb); Gregory, *Dialogues*, 4.1-5. See discussion in chapter two.
Revelations. This example illustrates how humanity’s limited ways of knowing the spiritual world lead to a dialectic between doubt and faith.

The general consensus in the twelfth century was that the majority of the beings, objects, and places that visionaries described in the Other World were similitudes or images. These images lacked material antecedents. Despite their lack of materiality, these images or similitudes could provoke true responses in both visionaries and separate souls. This conception of the way the Other World appeared derives from Augustine’s theories of vision and the similar nature of the imagination, dreams, and visions of the Other World.

**Augustinian Spiritual Vision**

In his *De Genesi ad litteram*, or *Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Augustine divides vision into three types: corporeal, spiritual and intellectual. Corporeal vision is the sight of corporeal objects, often simply called bodies, physically present to the senses. Spiritual vision, in contrast, is the sight of the images of absent bodies. This second mode of vision covers a vast range of experiences, describing memory, imagination, dreams, and the majority of otherworldly visions. Intellectual vision, unlike the first two, is a form of knowledge that surpasses all images and is provided by the divinity itself. These types of vision are hierarchical. Spiritual vision is more excellent than corporeal, because the soul is superior to the body. Above spiritual vision, intellectual vision is the most excellent type of vision, because it is completely free of corporeal

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63 Augustine’s system of vision is outlined in the twelfth book of his *De Genesi ad litteram* in the context of an explanation of 2 Cor. 12.2-4, or Paul’s journey to the Third Heaven. This passage provided the basis for the influential *Visio Pauli*. Spiritual vision corresponds to the Second Heaven, or the heaven of corporeal similitude. In particular, spiritual vision is summarized in 12.23.
signs or imagery; it is the stuff of the immaterial mind alone. Only this vision can reveal the divinity “through a direct vision.” The true encounter with God “face to face” is immaterial mind to immaterial mind. Any revelation of spiritual things involving corporeal imagery is a type of mediation.

Augustine’s category of spiritual vision is particularly important for the visions collected in the Book of Revelations. Through spiritual vision, a separate soul can experience phenomena like those that arise through regular sense perception even though the soul lacks the requisite sensory organs. Spiritual vision carries sensations drawn from the other senses within it, such as touch, taste, and smell. In short, all the sensory attributes of a material thing encountered in normal life: touch, taste, smell, and appearance, can, in this context, be referred to as an image, or more precisely as part of the image of this bodily thing. This grouping under the rubric of “image” results from the fact that all of these sensations are experienced through the category of spiritual vision, when they occur in the imagination, the memory, dreams, or visions. Since this vision is independent of material bodies, separate souls can utilize it as well. Experientially, these spiritual images often cannot be differentiated from images arising from corporeal vision.

For example, in the City of God, Augustine explains the suffering of the rich man in the flames

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65 Augustine, De Genesi, 12.26, 420. “os ad os loquatur deus ei quem dignum tali conloquio fecerit, non os corporis, sed mentis.”
66 For example, hearing results in the creation of the “images of words” in the spirit, and the motions of the body are thought out in advance through “images” of the future movement. Augustine, De Genesi, 12.16, 402. “itemque in auditu, nisi auribus percepitae uocis imaginem continuo spiritus in se ipso formaret ac memoria retineret... si transactos corporis motus memoriter spiritus non teneret....”
67 Augustine, De Genesi, 12.23, 415. “imagines corporum spiritus ueris corporibus ita miscet, ut internosci uel uix possint uel omnino non possint...”
of Hell found in Luke 16:19-31 by explaining that the hellfire, in which the rich man burned, was an incorporeal similitude not a material flame.\textsuperscript{68}

According to Augustine’s category of spiritual vision, the apparently material things encountered in the Other World by a separate soul, or by a visionary temporarily traveling as a soul, are really signs. These signs signify immaterial realities. The correct heuristic use of these signs ultimately depends upon the intellectual vision granted by God, such as Joseph’s interpretation of Pharaoh’s dream.\textsuperscript{69} Visions, dreams, and other revelations delivered in imagery drawn from the corporeal world can be read like a text as well as experienced like an event in normal life. The mode of experience in which the Other World appears to the living is discursive; signs drawn from the material world allow stories to be told about the spiritual world, but these signs should never be mistaken as the same as their signifiers. Augustine’s world of experience for a separate soul, in the form of his second category of vision, is imaginary in the literal sense, in that it consists of images, but imaginary should not be confused with mendacious. Most importantly, the effect that these images produce experientially for souls is not false. As Augustine stresses, “the joy and vexation produced by a spiritual substance are real.”\textsuperscript{70}

\textbf{The Images of Corporeal Things as Signs in the \textit{Book of Revelations}}

The absence of any part of the \textit{Literal Interpretation of Genesis} in the \textit{Book of Revelations} is remarkable; however, the heart of Augustine’s category of spiritual vision is outlined by excerpts from other Augustinian works that Peter of Cornwall did choose to copy. In

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\textsuperscript{68} Augustine, \textit{De civ.}, 21.10: 34-37, 776; 1067-68. “Sic ergo incorporalis et illa flamma qua exarsit et illa guttula quam poposcit, qualia sunt etiam uisa dormientium siue in ecstasi cernentium res incorporales, habentes tamen similitudinem corporum. Nam et ipse homo cum spiritu, non corpore, sit in talibus uisis, ita se tamen tunc similem suo corpori uidet, ut discernere omnino non possit.”
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\textsuperscript{69} Augustine, \textit{De Genesi}, 12.9, 391-92.
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\textsuperscript{70} Augustine, \textit{De Genesi}, 12.32, 427; 224. “sunt tamen et uera laetitia est et uera molestia facta de substantia spiritali.”
\end{flushright}
particular, the separate soul’s parallel experience to dreamers is clearly laid out in the *Dream of Gemnadius.*\(^{71}\) Likewise, the excerpt from *The Care to be Taken for the Dead* suggests that when the dead appear it could be only their images, manipulated by a higher intelligence to convey a message of some kind.\(^{72}\) This potential manipulation of images by God, angels, and even demons is highly significant. These images become a sensory language for the conveyance of messages. One could even view their making and manipulation as a kind of parallel creation, mirroring and reenacting the “prior” activity of the formation of material reality itself. While Augustine’s theoretical discussion itself is absent, Peter did include examples, drawn from Augustinian works, where it can be found in practice.

Beyond the excerpts from Augustinian works, many other allusions to the imaginary world of separate souls, like those found in the *De Genesi ad literam,* arise throughout the *Book of Revelations.* Gregory the Great provides several such moments. He explains that a vast wood pyre, or a ship seen in a vision, should not be taken as actually materially present in the Other World. Instead, the appearance of these things in a vision facilitates storytelling about the spiritual world, and grants some understanding of spiritual and eschatological matters through comparisons with phenomena familiar to the living.\(^{73}\) Such imagery drawn from the material world is necessary because, as Gregory claims in a section that was not copied into the *Book of Revelations,* “from the images of things, we assign the due rewards of actions.”\(^{74}\) Similarly, the author of one of the Marian tales, present in the *Book of Revelations,* excuses St. Peter’s act of

\(^{71}\) LR (4ra-4vb); Augustine, “Letter 159,” ed. Goldbacher. CSEL 44.3, pp 497-502. See discussion in Chapter Two.

\(^{72}\) LR (5vb-9va); Augustine, *De cura,* 10-22. For this conclusion, see LR (6vb); Augustine, *De cura,* 15-16. See discussion in Chapter Two.

\(^{73}\) For the pyre of wood, LR 1.114 (97ra); Gregory, *Dialogues,* 4.32.5. For the ship, LR 1.119 (98vb); *Dialogues,* 4.36.11.

\(^{74}\) Gregory, *Dialogues,* 4.38.3, 136. “Ex rerum, Petre, imaginibus pensamus merita causarum.” Zimmerman offers the translation, “We arrive at a true understanding through images,” 242. This response is part of Gregory’s answer to another objection raised by Peter the Deacon over the continued presence of corporeal imagery in the Other World (4.38.2: fumes, mists, a bridge, and a river).
menacing the devil with his keys by saying, “incorporeal things cannot be recounted to corporeal [beings] unless through corporeal things.” These excerpts stress the value of corporeal imagery as a vehicle for the transmission of moral messages in the form of edifying stories.

Several of the longer visions in the *Book of Revelations* strongly suggest that the seemingly material places and objects visionaries encounter are really incorporeal similitudes standing in as signs for inexpressible, incorporeal realities. This suggestion takes the shape of a progression through the Other World until the visionary’s sight, and the descriptive power of language, fails completely. This moment of failure is the actual Heaven, where God and perfected human beings reside, and like Augustine’s third category of vision, they cannot be recounted in corporeal imagery. These include the *Vision of Drythelm*, the *Vision of the Monk of Eynsham*, *St. Patrick’s Purgatory*, and the *Vision of Ailsi* which Peter himself authored. In these visions, the visionary is held back from Heaven and Hell as they truly exist, because a living man cannot experience or describe them; instead, he sees only a way station or holding point before final blessedness. In the *Vision of Ailsi*, Ailsi, Peter’s grandfather, travels through the Other World with his dead son, named Pagan, as his guide. After passing through the places of punishment, the father and son finally arrive at a vast plain filled with all manner of impossibly pleasant things. This is not Heaven. Pagan explains that, like the other rejoicing souls

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76 Robert Easting has identified this trope (the “inexpressibility topos”) of holding off access to Heaven in visionary accounts, or at least insisting that those who have seen it cannot actually describe it. “Access to Heaven in Medieval Visions of the Otherworld,” in *Envisaging Heaven in the Middle Ages*, ed. Carolyn Muessig and Ad Putter (London: Routledge, 2007), 75-81. He also describes that female authors were often more confident claiming access to Heaven than male clerics.


78 Peter explains that Pagan took his name from the fact that he was not baptised until he was twelve. He died very shortly afterward. LR 1.6 (26rb); Sharpe and Easting, 202.
all around, he is waiting here “patiently” to enter into Heaven itself. Eventually, he will merit entrance, but when that will be he does not know. He explains that only the “perfect” can enter into Heaven itself where they, like the angels, see God “face to face.”

Pagan’s waiting at the gate of Heaven “patiently” \([\textit{in patientia}]\) until he deserves to enter it suggests that his purgation is somehow incomplete. As Pagan describes his experience while waiting as the “greatest peace and joy” the reader must ask what else remains to be accomplished. The experience of the true Heaven, as Pagan explains it, is virtually synonymous with the vision of God. A reader familiar with Augustine’s system of vision would suggest that this vision is devoid of any images or attributes derived from matter. Pagan waits in a seemingly corporeal paradise, filled with the most pleasant things imaginable. Of course, these pleasant things are only images, and Pagan explains that he endures these images until he can surpass them.

Just as the places and objects that visionaries report are incorporeal similitudes, so too are the bodies within which visionaries and the dead experience the Other World. These images of bodies stand in for an immaterial reality. In the story of Roger and Alexander, the two monks of Stratford Langthorne, the image of Alexander’s body actually dissolves reflecting his progress towards blessedness. Roger and Alexander, friends since the novitiate, had agreed that the first of them to die would return after death to the other. Alexander died and indeed appeared thirty days after his death. He first manifests as a great weight on Roger’s shoulders, and only communicates after being conjured in the name of God. He then appears as himself in life and reveals that he is not yet in glory. One year later, Alexander comes again, this time manifesting

\footnote{LR 1.6 (28ra); Sharpe and Easting, 212. “Ubi summa perfruor quiete et gaudio, exspectans hic in patientia donec merear introduci in celum….”}

\footnote{LR 1.6 (28ra); Sharpe and Easting, 210. “perfectorum anime que statim postquam egressse sunt a corporibus suis celum intrauerunt, et sicut angeli ipsi Deum uident facie ad faciem.”}
within, or perhaps as, an “immense brightness” like “a flash of lightning,” accompanied by a wonderful smell. From this “globe of light” Roger hears Alexander’s familiar voice. As this change in appearance suggests, Alexander confirms that he is now in glory.

Alexander’s appearance as a globe of light recalls other occasions where souls manifest as spheres and not as the images of bodies. The sphere was the perfect shape, a likeness of the universe itself and the motions of the heavens. The perfect sphere was also regarded as an incorporeal, mathematical idea, and had a long pedigree as a way to imagine the incorporeal and the divine. Godric of Finchale, much like Roger the lay-brother, beholds a soul as a sphere on at least two occasions. At the repeated request of a monk, Godric with some reluctance shares how one could describe the soul of his friend Ailric. Godric’s initial unwillingness to share may at first appear strange since he himself had earnestly prayed to see Ailric’s soul leave his body. Godric describes the soul appearing “in the likeness of a kind of dry and burning wind, as if it were in a round shape on all sides in a spherical likeness of a revolving body” that shone everywhere with a brilliant white light. Likewise, Godric saw the soul of Abbot Robert in the likeness of a “round circle of flame.” Excerpts from Gregory’s Dialogues that Peter placed in the Book of Revelations twice recount the ascent of the soul of Germanus, bishop of Capua, as a

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81 LR 1.205 (125va); Sharpe and Easting, 242. “Cum ecce in ipsa noctis obscuritate in similitudine fulguris choriuscantis, claritas inmensa per quandam que ibi erat uitem fenestram subintrans tremulis motibus uidebatur agitari.”

82 Discussed as a possible origin for souls appearing as spheres by Carol Zaleski, Otherworld Journeys, 51, esp. n. 30.

83 One example of the Platonic heritage that may lie behind souls seen as spheres can be found in Plotinus, Enneads, trans. A. H. Armstrong (Harvard University Press, 1966-88), 5.8.9.8-17. Cited in Patricia Cox Miller, The Corporeal Imagination: Signifying the Holy in Late Ancient Christianity (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 26 n. 56. In the twelfth century, Alan of Lille famously stated that “God is an intelligible sphere whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere,” in his Regulae Theologicae (Rule 7). He likely drew this comparison/paradox from the Liber XXIV philosophorum, a text written in the second half of the twelfth century. G.R. Evans, Alan of Lille: The Frontiers of Theology in the Later Twelfth Century (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 64-73.

84 LR 1.82 (86ra); Reginald of Durham, Vita Godrici, 12.36, 51. “‘Animam,’ inquit, ‘isti us, de qua perquiris, in similitudinem cuiusdam uenti arentis uidi et fervidi, quasi undique in rotundo scemate in spherical corporis similitudine regi rantis.’”

85 LR 1.83 (86rb); Reginald of Durham, Vita Godrici, 75.161, 171.
fiery sphere.\textsuperscript{86} Outside, of the excerpts in the \textit{Book of Revelations}, souls also appear as spheres, particularly in the \textit{Dialogue on Miracles} of Caesarius of Heisterbach.\textsuperscript{87}

Even the sphere, however, remained too corporeal to actually convey the true nature of the soul. Excerpts from the \textit{Life} of Godric of Finchale are particularly telling in their repeated apologies for their use of corporeal imagery for human souls. Souls take on various symbolic appearances, but they do not themselves have a shape or physical substance. Godric was accustomed to describe the human soul as a sphere. In the text of the \textit{Life}, when Godric expresses his wonder that “the entire substance of the invisible soul underneath its spherical shape is round,”\textsuperscript{88} Reginald of Durham, the author of the \textit{Life}, intervenes, stressing that when Godric spoke about the soul’s shape he did so with “joking simplicity.” The actual substance of the soul cannot be apprehended by human observers. Instead, what appears in visions like those Godric described is an intelligible image.\textsuperscript{89}

\textbf{Corporeal Imagery, Sin, and the “Region of Unlikeness”}

The discussion above leads us to one of the major assumptions running within the \textit{Book of Revelations} regarding contemporary ideas of separate souls’ experience in the Other World. Visionaries, along with most of the souls of the dead, see the images of material things, standing in for spiritual things, due to their epistemological and moral deficiencies, ultimately stemming from the Fall. They do not see the spiritual world as it is; instead, they must approach it through corporeal similitudes until the effects of sin are completely purged. Only then will they see the spiritual world “face to face.” Hugh of St. Victor outlines just such a progression for human

\textsuperscript{86} LR, Prologue (5va-vb); Gregory, \textit{Dialogues}, 4.8. LR 1.106 (94va); Gregory, \textit{Dialogues}, 2.35.2-4.

\textsuperscript{87} Caesarius of Heisterbach, \textit{Dialogus Miraculorum}, 1.32 and 4.39.

\textsuperscript{88} LR 1.83 (86va); \textit{Vita Godrici}, 75.161, 171. “Unde frequenter amicis colloquentibus, et de rebus spiritualibus perunctantibus, dicere solitus est quod plurimum admiraretur quia substantia animae invisibilis tota sub spherico schemate rotunda est.”

\textsuperscript{89} LR 1.83 (86va); \textit{Vita Godrici}, 75.161, 171-72. “Hoc tamen jocose simplicitate proloqui consuevit, quia naturalem spiritus ipsius substantiam conspectibus non posse reprehendi humanis persensit… At species illa, quae conspicitur, quoddam est individuum visibile, sub alicuius intelligentiae forma capabile efficaciur.”
The soul, in its often misplaced affection for the things of this world, clings to these images. When these worldly things are absent, the soul immediately makes images of them within itself, such as when we dream. Souls, when they leave bodies, continue to behave in this way:

The soul itself, in as much as it is affected by the love of the body, drawing with it a kind of fleshiness, is deformed by these very same phantasms of corporeal imaginings, and from these same deeply impressed [phantasms] it is not separated even when freed from the body.  

The soul would then experience the Other World in these images, as Augustine describes. Hugh implies that a soul that has freed itself from its affections would be free from the phantasms of material things. This would include even the image of its own body. The liberated soul would then exit the realm of similitudes and behold God face to face.

This idea of souls’ experience in the Other World is far more than Victorine. This concept logically grows out of the works of Augustine, and indeed it appears as a widely held assumption regarding the separate soul’s itinerary. Importantly for the Book of Revelations, it appears prominently in contemporary works marked by Cistercian influence. Peter’s own social circle and source base for the Book of Revelations particularly relied on Cistercian contacts, and the manuscript’s contents reflect this wider view. An almost identical argument to that offered by

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90 I refer here to an opusculum, “De unione corporis et spiritus,” PL 177: 288. Hugh’s implication by comparing the images of the imagination to a skin is that just as the Fall led the parents of the human race to clothe their bodies, so too did it condemn them and their descendants to always approach truth through the medium of imagery.

91 Hugh of St. Victor, “De unione corporis et spiritus,” PL 177: 288 C-D. “Ipsa quippe anima, inquantum delectatione corporis afficitur quasi quamdam corpulentiam trahens, in eadem phantasiis imaginationum corporalium deformatur, eisdemque alte impressis etiam soluta corpore non exuitur.”

92 Hugh, “De unione,” PL 177: 288 B-C. “Hinc est quod animae corporibus exuitae, corporalibus adhuc passionibus teneri possunt, quia videlicet a corruptione corporalium affectionum nondum mundatae sunt.”

93 In a similar vein, Bernard McGinn argues that Hell for John Scottus Eriugena was really “the continuing existence in the minds of the wicked of the fantasies of the things that mislead them during their time on earth.” Periphyseon 5 [977AB], in The Growth of Mysticism, (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 112. While Eriugena’s ultimate argument regarding the nature of the final Hell differs radically from the twelfth-century authors I discuss, he illustrates a theme in which they continued to participate.
Hugh of St. Victor, using parts of his own text, can be found in the *Liber de spiritu et anima* written by an author under Cistercian influence. Likewise, Aelred of Rievaulx in his *De anima* describes a similar theory to explain what souls see, and how they can be said to suffer various seemingly corporeal torments. Following this logic, one can see the Other World, as reported by visionaries such as Drythelm, Edmund, Owein, or Ailsi as really a temporary continuation of the living world. Indeed, these visions openly profess that there are final destinations beyond their remit or descriptive abilities. A soul’s liberation from the images of things becomes an important component of its purgation in the beyond. As Pagan explains to his father, he remains in a paradise of apparently corporeal delights “patiently.” The true Heaven is utterly incorporeal. The reality of Heaven is indescribable and inaccessible to both Ailsi and Pagan, as they both are not yet perfected. The actual heaven cannot be described through terms familiar to human beings who know only the current, fallen corporeal world.

Indeed, Bernard of Clairvaux describes an otherworldly journey for souls out of corporeal imagery, identifying the immediate experience of the separate soul as really a continuation of the things of this life. In one of his sermons, Bernard suggests that the effects of the Augustinian “region of dissimilitude” continue into the Other World. Bernard divides the human experience

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95 Aelred, *De anima*, 3.35, 746. “Egressae de corpore animae et omni re corporali et sensuali exutae in corporalium rerum ursantur imaginibus, quasi eis dum adduxit sensus impresserat; in quibus aliae suscipiuntur ab alterius naturae spiritibus, corporalibus gehennae ignibus ut placet beato Gregorio cruciandae, aliae flamma incorpora in sui corporis imagine torquendae, sicut de duite illo euangelica testatur historia.”

96 Claude Carozzi identified the significance of this sermon for medieval conceptions of the separate soul’s experience, particularly as a continuation of experiences like those of life. He argued that Bernard’s terrestrialization of the Other World stood in marked contrast to more spiritualizing approaches. Here, I would like to argue that the ultimate trajectory is still spiritual. “Structure et function de la vision de Trugdal,” 233. For the origin of the term, see Augustine, *Confessionum Libri XIII*, ed. Lucas Verheijen CCSL 27 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981), 7.10, 1.15, “et inveni longe me esse a te in regione dissimilitudinis, tamquam audirem vocem tuam de excelsio: ‘cibus sum grandium: cresce et manducabis me. nec tu me in te mutabis sicut cibum carnis tuae, sed tu mutaberis in me.’” Discussed in the context of medieval specular imagery, Edward Peter Nolan, *Now Through a Glass Darkly:*
and journey into five regions: the region of dissimilitude, the cloistral paradise, the region of expiation, the region of Gehenna, and the super-celestial paradise. The first is the starting place for human beings, and is defined by the presence of sin and its resultant disabilities. The next two regions aim to repair them, while the final two represent eventual failure or success in this process. Only the region of dissimilitude and the cloistral paradise occur during life on earth; however, the effects of the region of dissimilitude define the experience of all the regions except the super-celestial paradise.

The region of dissimilitude is the experience of the present life, in which, because of sin, man made as an image of God nonetheless resembles the divinity very imperfectly. This term describes the essential epistemological difficulty facing living human beings seeking their creator: in the current world, all we encounter is a blurred reflection, leading towards an origin that it indicates but from which it remains stubbornly separate. It is this very epistemological deficiency that necessitates revelations like those Peter collected, but these revelations still “speak” in the sensory terms familiar to fallen humanity. In this space, man seeks after various types of ultimately “unreal” and “illusory” goods in place of the one true good. The things of this world are ultimately hollow if taken out of their proper position as signs pointing to their creator. The separate soul brings this disability with it, and the images of the world remain within it as a part of its dissimilitude. These images, which in the Other World lack material

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*Specular Images of Being and Knowing from Virgil to Chaucer* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1990), 57.


antecedents, are, when they are encountered by separate souls, equally “illusory” to the actual material things they resemble as encountered by the living. If the proper symbolic relationships are disrupted, the meaning and reality of everything dissolves. As far as a thing is not appreciated within its proper relationship to the good, i.e. in recognition of its resemblance to the God that created it, it is nothing.\textsuperscript{100} The region of dissimilitude is defined by its misplaced desires and inaccurate discourses, which equate to a proliferation of illusions.

Such a journey out of the region of dissimilitude and the misplaced affections for material, created things explains the two appearances of the monk Alexander, described by Peter of Cornwall’s Cistercian acquaintances at Stratford Langthorne.\textsuperscript{101} Alexander first appears during his purgation in the Other World to his friend Roger. In this initial visit, he looks like he did in life. Like Pagan, he has remained immersed in corporeal imagery in penance. When he appears a second time, he is utterly transformed into what seemed to his friend to be a ball of light. As Alexander’s corporeal affections have been overcome, his manifestation has altered. Even this final form is figurative; the closest expression to his blessed existence that Roger could comprehend while still living in the world.

\textbf{Being Double: The Complex Reality Outside the Theory}

Despite these numerous testimonies to the experience of the Other World through images and signs, it would be misleading to suggest that Peter’s conception was at all so clean or simple. The rivers, bodies, mountains and fields of the Other World can be only signs, a collection of images and sensations signifying an unknowable spiritual reality beyond all corporeality and

\textsuperscript{100} This implication found profound expression in the work of some later medieval mystics. Marguerite Porete, in particular, develops this theme in her arguments for the annihilation of self will and the return to identity with God, as well as in her distinction between lost and sad souls. Lost souls attempt to find God in terms drawn from this world since their wills are oriented only to created things. \textit{Speculum simplicium animarum}, ed. P. Verdeyen CCCM 69 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1986), esp. 91, 256-59; Ellen L. Babiaisky, trans., \textit{The Mirror of Simple Souls} (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 166-67.

\textsuperscript{101} LR 1.205 (124va-126rb). See discussion of Peter’s relationship to the monks of Stratford Langthorne in the first chapter and the summary of this story earlier in this chapter.
language. Medieval storytellers and audiences, however, did not universally adopt this view. Very often, a reader will suspect that medieval authors regarded the objects and sights of the Other World as somehow both immaterial images and physical objects, or that the distinction was puzzlingly unimportant.¹⁰²

In this section, I suggest that conceptions of the Other World were part of a wider discourse regarding the eschaton that was marked by two potentially contradictory emphases: transcendence on the one hand, and continuity on the other. This eschatological discourse has attracted a good deal of recent scholarly attention, particularly regarding the Resurrection.¹⁰³ Parallel to these studies regarding the resurrection of the body, I suggest that medieval authors argued for a similar set of apparently contradictory truths regarding the spiritual world after death: an Other World that was totally immaterial and completely unknowable as it really is, and an Other World that held within it recognizable and material presences. It is by embracing both assertions that we can understand the function of the Book of Revelations. This “double-think,” in many respects, parallels the relationship between assertion, doubt and faith suggested by Steven Justice. I suggest below how the process of faith and the telling of revelatory stories co-exist in the same space, defined by humanity’s estrangement from God in the regio dissimilitudinis.¹⁰⁴

The experience of the separate soul that is recounted in visionary narratives is a continuation of the regio dissimilitudinis, or the realm of unlikeness, that characterizes the post-lapsarian experience of human life. Existence in this region of unlikeness for human beings is

¹⁰² Robert Easting remarks upon just such a general lack of concern about whether what is seen by a visionary is physical or a sign. “Access to Heaven in Medieval Visions of the Otherworld,” 87.
¹⁰³ Much of this work has stemmed from or been influenced by the work of Caroline Walker Bynum in The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity. For its reception and influence, see Bynum and Paul Freedman, ed., Last Things, Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).
¹⁰⁴ Alexander Murray’s use of the term “double-think” provides a starting point for some of the questions asked in the following section, Reason and Society in the Middle Ages (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 8.
marked by deficient epistemology. As the soul returns to blessedness, as it recovers or repairs the
divine likeness, it returns, as a result, to a pre-lapsarian epistemology. Outside of the realm of
unlikeness, the soul once again can see the divine face to face. In this reparative movement, the
epistemological disability that prompted Peter of Cornwall to compile his revelations disappears.
Seen in this light, the revelations Peter gathered are a discourse both necessitated and limited by
the realm of unlikeness. Visions and revelations share this realm of estrangement with faith.
Faith promises transcendence from the limitations of this limited discourse. The approach to God
in this space is defined by faith and the process of faith. The regio dissimilitudinis is the space
for doubt, for faith, and for visions.

Although the Book of Revelations recounts individuals’ experiences of the Other World
during the period before the end of this world, the essential epistemological progression featured
in many of its items is the same, or almost the same, as that promised to the elect at the
Resurrection. While an individual’s final true happiness is not complete without the body, many
authorities in Peter’s time did argue for some direct experiential encounter with the divine that
occurred while separate from it. In this similarity lies the essential parallelism between
discourses regarding visionary experience and those regarding the resurrection of the body.

In her book, The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, Caroline Walker
Bynum argues that an emphasis on continuity defines the work of Western theologians regarding
the final human state. In the opinions of a majority of these medieval authors, the resurrection
body would be perfect and “spiritual,” but it would, nonetheless, be made of flesh and indeed of
the same flesh it possessed in life, and it would possess the same members and general
appearance. It would also be changeless and, for the elect, incapable of suffering. The body
would be both transformed, and remain the same. In her analysis, these apparently contradictory
assertions could invoke “philosophical incoherence, theological equivocation, or aesthetic offensiveness.” As we will see below, discussions of the nature of the Other World can produce similar feelings.

Similar to the resurrection body, the Other World is described as both utterly bodiless and different, as well as corporeal and recognizable. Bynum and other scholars have detected a shift in the thirteenth century “from an emphasis on the resurrection of the body to stress on the experience of the soul after death.” This soul that received ever more attention, however, was imagined as a human body. Given that Peter’s sources repeatedly suggest the incompleteness of this imagining, this image of the soul as a body is figurative. This imaginary speech is necessitated by our estranged existence from God. Hugh of St. Victor, in particular, suggests a complete transcendence of the image of all corporeal things as well as the affections that tie humanity to them. It is here, where the same apparent contradiction that has so attracted Bynum in her study of the Resurrection rears its head. Even for the Victorine, the body and corporeality will return. At first, blessedness seems synonymous with the liberation of the soul from images, but, upon closer consideration, the very things that lie behind these images, which constitute the world of matter itself, are destined for redemption not destruction, and the resurrection body will have the eyes to see them. A complete banishment of matter and its effects cannot hold, while the sensory experience of the perfected human being cannot be described, especially in its relationship to the perfected but recognizable body. Repeated

107 See discussion above, “A World Made of Images” and esp. note 90.
108 In the terms favored by Hugh of St. Victor, the eye of contemplation will be regained, and the eye of reason will be repaired; however, with the reacquisition of contemplation and the repair of reason, the eye of the flesh will not be destroyed. Hugh, De Sacramentis, 1.10.2, 225; 167. This model of vision was ultimately inspired by Paul, 1 Corinthians 2:9-12. The inability to describe how the interaction between these epistemological modes will function is clearly in evidence when Hugh considers the blessed after the Resurrection closing their eyes. They will still have the eyelids to do it, but surely they will still see God and thus everything else. De sacramentis, 2.18.13, 600.
inconsistencies continually result from this situation. Far from being unnoted or thoughtlessly suppressed, these inconsistencies will prove fertile and essential ground for the development of faith in the context of revelation.

**Fire in the Other World**

The presence of corporeal fire in the Other World is a telling example of this incomplete and inconsistent banishment of matter. Regarding the presence of this otherworldly fire, medieval authors raised precisely the same problematic identified by Zaleski, Carozzi and other scholars, namely a disjuncture between an incorporeal Other World, experienced through images alone, and a corporeal Other World, materially existing as described. In general, the same medieval authors who argued that the experience of the soul lay only in images argued just as strongly for the presence of an actual corporeal flame in the hereafter. This flame could torment spirits as well as bodies, and did indeed torment disembodied human souls before the Resurrection. By the time the *Book of Revelations* was compiled, the presence of a corporeal flame in the Other World, a more-than-imaginary fire that tormented spirits without bodies, enjoyed near-universal acceptance. Fire in the Otherworld serves as a parallel and alternative to the human body as a meeting place between the spiritual and the material. In the context of this discussion, it most clearly represents the mixed nature of the Other World as a place that is both immaterial and symbolic, but also corporeal and literal. It is the stubborn and essential point of continuity beside transformation and transcendence.

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109 Carozzi initially suggested that such a conflict existed between twelfth-century authors regarding the Other World “Structure et fonction de la vision de Tnugdal,” in *Faire croire: Modalités de la diffusion et de la reception des messages religieux du XIIe au XVe siècle* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1981): 223-34. Bynum responded that the conflict is not between authors but within authors, *The Resurrection of the Body*, 139. In what follows, I have attempted to develop this suggestion by developing relatively neglected areas where this internal conflict appears. Zaleski coined the term “somatomorphic souls” to describe the paradoxical embodiment of the soul, *Otherword Journeys*, 51-52.
The presence of corporeal fire in the Other World before the Resurrection has a long pedigree. Augustine argues that the fires that disembodied souls encounter are incorporeal likenesses. He, however, maintains that bodiless creatures could suffer in flames in order to account for demons’ final torments in Hell at the end of time. He does not suggest that human souls could suffer in a corporeal flame in the way reserved for demons. Gregory the Great makes exactly this suggestion, using an almost identical argument to maintain that human souls suffer in corporeal flames even before the Resurrection. After the Resurrection of the Body, the damned will burn bodily in these same fires, in which they had previously burned as spirits. Gregory’s ideas regarding the fire’s materiality became dominant in the Western tradition after him. The apparently contradictory opinions of Gregory and Augustine were harmonized in the Prognosticum of Julian of Toledo. Julian creates the appearance that the two doctors both believed a corporeal flame tormented separate souls. In particular, souls experience the Other World in likenesses, often referred to as “images” as Augustine’s spiritual mode of vision outlines, but the flames are physically present as well.

Later authors appear to follow the model set up by Julian in their accounts of otherworldly fire. Peter Lombard, for example, cites Julian by name in his Sentences regarding

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110 The following discussion of otherworldly fire’s materiality is drawn from Michael Barbezat, “In a Corporeal Flame: The Materiality of Hellfire Before the Resurrection in Six Latin Authors,” Viator 44 (2013), Forthcoming.
112 Augustine, De civ., 21.10: 14-27, 776. Augustine’s true opinion regarding demonic corporeality has proven elusive for both medieval and modern scholars, Dyan Elliott, Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 128-35. Arguably, he preferred demons with an aerial body. In this text, he explores both options.
113 Gregory, Dialogues, 4.30. The similarity to Augustine’s system of potentially bodiless demons suffering in a material fire has been noted, see Vogüé, Dialogues, 100, n. XXX, 1.
Importantly for this discussion, fire’s physical presence in the Other World creates problems regarding the interpretation of visionaries’ accounts. Hugh of St. Victor, for example, maintains that visionaries see spiritual things in the shape and form of material things. He also believes, however, that separate souls are tormented by a corporeal flame, despite the fact that earlier in the same treatise he includes flame in the list of imaginary inhabitants of the Other World. For Hugh, this material fire logically needs to be in a material place, likely under the earth. Visionaries see spiritual things in the form of corporeal things; however, the fire is what it appears to be, namely a corporeal fire like that known from life. Hugh himself acknowledges that the situation is beyond reason and that the phenomena themselves are beyond effective observation. We cannot know exactly how otherworldly fire will work, but we must take on faith that it is corporeal and that it will torment the incorporeal: “On account of the multitude [ways] of speaking, we should not deviate from the simplicity of believing.” The contradictory assertions both present opportunity for doubt and highlight the limits of human understanding. It is in this space that faith articulates itself. This point of convergence and divergence in flame, as outlined by Hugh of St. Victor, plays a prominent role in the first text present in the Book of Revelations.

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115 Peter Lombard, Sententiae in IV libris distinctae (Rome: Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 1981), 4.64.7, 520. “De hoc Iulianus, Toletanae Ecclesiae episcopus, Gregorii dicta secutus ita scripsit: Si uiuentis hominis incorporeus spiritus tenetur in corpore, cur non post mortem etiam corporeo igne tenatur?”

116 Hugh, De sacramentis, 2.16.3: 3-6, 554; 438. “Sed uerissime auctoritate sacri eloquii et catholice ueritatis testimonio probatur. corporali et materiali igne animas etiam nunc ante susceptionem corporum cruciari.” For flames in the list of incorporeal things, see 2.16.2, 552; 436. “in his omnibus tamen nihil nisi vel corporale vel corporalibus simile recitasse; flumina, flammas, pontes, naves, domos, nemora, prata, flores, homines nigroros, candidos, etc….. Quae omnia si ita illic visibiliter et corporaliter esse credimus, praeter alia quae absurda nascentur, ipsas utique animas etiam a corporibus separatas corpora esse ad similitudinem corporum menbris compactas atque distinctas confitemur.”

117 Hugh, De sacramentis, 2.16.4: 1-2, 555; 439. “Sicut peccatoribus cruciandis deus penas corporales preparauit. ita etiam ad ipsas penas corporales loca corporalia distinxit.”

118 Hugh of St. Victor, De sacramentis, 2.16.5, “Sed aliud est rerum veritas, aliud verborum varietas. Neque nos oportet propter multitudinem dicendi a simplicitate deviare credendi…. Ergo abdita sunt receptacula animarum, nec potest ab homine definiri quod non potest ab homine sciri. Item qualis sit intelligendus ignis ille gehennae, et quemadmodum igne corporali incorporei spiritus sive animae corporibus solutae cruciari possint, non solum fidei christianae, sed sacri eloqui auctoritas non enodat.”
The existence of a material flame in the hereafter could imply that some of the things visionaries report are only images, while some of them are not. In fact, it is this very same situation that the prologue to *Saint Patrick’s Purgatory* describes. The issue in this text transcends the presence of fire alone to encompass the entire Other World’s mode of existence in relation to materiality. The first vision in the *Book of Revelations*, the *Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii*, or *St. Patrick’s Purgatory*, recounts the story of the knight Owein’s bodily journey to the Other World. This embodied journey was highly unusual, for unlike most visionaries that traveled as a spirit, Owein claimed to have literally descended into the Other World and experienced it with his bodily senses. These claims naturally raise questions regarding the status of the places, things, and beings the knight Owein claimed to have encountered. In particular, this story may seem to prove that all the things visionaries report seeing in the spiritual world “exist there visibly and corporeally.” Was the Other World literally physically present beneath a cave in Ireland, a world like ours that anyone could walk into?

That the Other World was a parallel and apparently material reality was a possibility that occurred to medieval interpreters of visions. In his *De sacramentis Christianae fidei*, Hugh of St. Victor questioned whether the bridges, rivers, ships, and so on that visionaries report having seen can be taken as physical objects. Following Augustine’s system for spiritual vision, he concludes that these places and objects are really signs, “similar to the corporeal” presented “for the demonstration of the spiritual.” The Other World, however, is not completely spiritual. Later in the same section of the treatise, Hugh insists on the corporeality of hellfire and that it resides in a corporeal place. Hugh’s consideration of this question provided guidance for the monastic author of *St. Patrick’s Purgatory* as he thought through the implications of the knight’s descent.

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119 Hugh of St. Victor, *De sacramentis*, 2.16.2, 553; 437. “signa quaedam corporalibus similia ad demonstrationem spiritualium presentantur…. ”
In the prologue to *St. Patrick’s Purgatory*, its Cistercian compiler, known only as H., took material without acknowledging its origin from the section of Hugh’s *De sacramentis* that deals with the apparently material sights visionaries report in the Other World.\(^{120}\) Keeping in mind the initial premise of the vision, that Owein entered the Other World in his body and experienced it in the flesh and with his bodily senses, the monk added two apparently contradictory assertions taken from Hugh’s discussion of visionary experience. First, that Owein’s journey provides evidence for the existence of corporeal torments after death, likely beneath the earth, and that these torments include a corporeal fire. Second, that the knight, “a corporeal and mortal man,” in fact, saw spiritual things “in a corporeal shape and form.” The problem is that an embodied man, using the senses of his body could not see the images of the Other World in the way Hugh, or any of the other similar theoreticians discussed above, described. What the monk proposes appears as a conflation of Augustine’s categories of corporeal and spiritual vision in which the “realm of unlikeness” and the realm that is merely a continuation of the realm of unlikeness collapse into each other.

In its abbreviation and reordering of the discussion present in the *De sacramentis*, the prologue to *St. Patrick’s Purgatory* perfectly presents the apparent disjunction between a fully spiritual and stubbornly material Other World proposed above. In this conflict between two apparent natures, fire and its location play a prominent role. The apparent contradiction is so jarring that some commentators have felt that the prologue’s logical deficiencies indicate that its author did not believe his own story.\(^{121}\) There is, however, every indication that H. did believe

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the knight’s story. In his opinion, as in the opinion of the majority of medieval readers, Owein did physically descend into Purgatory through the cave. We also can infer with virtual certainty that Peter of Cornwall, likewise, took this story to be literally true. The question remains, how do we account for such a seemingly bizarre prologue, apparently arguing against itself?

An answer begins to appear through a close reading of what the prologue actually manages to say, as opposed to a fixation on its central inconsistency. The prologue reorders the material it borrows from the *De sacramentis*, focusing on establishing that Owein’s vision, and its apparently novel claim of a physical voyage to the other world, is actually not novel in its particulars. The story’s claims, if taken individually, all have authoritative antecedents. The preface first establishes that the knight’s descriptions are like those offered by most other visionaries, full of apparently material things. Hugh’s statement that these depictions would seem to create an absurd situation, in which the spiritual world is material, is cut out. Instead, H. cuts off the sentence a few words in, adding: “and other things of this kind which contradict our account very little.” Indeed, the knight’s descriptions do seem like material things. H. does not yet address that these material images are exactly the problem, which was Hugh’s original point.

Instead of raising Hugh’s main problematic, H. begins to emphasize the assertions he finds in Hugh that stress the essentially unknown and unknowable nature of the Other World.

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123 For example, Peter’s treatment of the *Vision of the Monk of Eynsham* establishes his intention to reproduce only experiences that occurred as described.

124 *Tractatus*, 121-22, ll 18-33; *De Sacramentis*, 2.16.2, 551, lines 27-30, 552, ll 1-8 (approximate). The line numbers for this edition of the *De sacramentis* are for each page, while the line numbers for the *Tractatus* are for the entire text. For clarity, I have not included folio numbers for the LR, and I remind the reader that Easting’s edition (cited here) is based on it. The exact wording of the source text is often slightly different; all line numbers for the *De sacramentis* are approximate areas of active borrowing in the corresponding part of the *Tractatus*.

125 *Tractatus*, 122, ll 33-34; *De Sacramentis*, 2.16.2, 552, ll 8-12. Compare H. “et multa huiusmodi, quae nostre minime repugnant narrationi.” to Hugh “et alia huiusmodi quae non nisi corporali naturae convenire omnino possunt. Quae omnia si ita illic visibiliter et corporaliter esse credimus, praeter alia quae absurda nascuntur….”
Many inquire about the afterlife, the things that come after death, but “because they are hidden from us [they] should be feared rather than asked about.” One thing alone is certain to everyone, “a bad death does not follow a good life,” and that a good life is rewarded.\textsuperscript{126} The prologue then moves to discuss the places of punishment. There is a purgatorial punishment after death for just souls burdened by certain sins. These punishments are corporeal, and occur in corporeal places. The greatest punishments are likely located lowest in space, while the greatest joys appear to be at the highest points. Hell is like a shadowy prison, and Paradise is in the East. H. concludes that all of these assertions, attested to by other major authorities, are supported by his narrative.\textsuperscript{127} The presence of a corporeal fire, likewise, agrees with what the knight claimed, particularly as a purgatorial flame.\textsuperscript{128} The exact workings of these purgatorial punishments cannot be known by human beings in the current life.\textsuperscript{129} Finally, H. comes to Hugh’s assertion that the spiritual world is figured under the form of corporeal objects, and, as the monk observes, “That is why, in this account, spiritual things are said by a corporeal and mortal man to appear in a corporeal appearance and form.”\textsuperscript{130}

The prologue to \textit{St. Patrick’s Purgatory} emphasizes that all of the knight’s claims are testified to elsewhere, despite the fact that when taken together they try credulity. The knight’s journey into Purgatory demonstrates a whole host of individual assertions that must normally be taken solely on faith as articles of belief, but when assembled together fail to create a system satisfactory to human logic. The prologue’s writer seems to have turned to Hugh of St. Victor

\textsuperscript{127} \textit{Tractatus}, 122, ll 41-54; \textit{De Sacramentis}, 2.16.4, 555-56. The borrowings run widely through this section, in inverted order. As H. summarizes, they all find confirmation in Owein’s story, “quod et huic uidetur congruere narrationi.”  
\textsuperscript{128} \textit{Tractatus}, 122, ll 60-62; \textit{De Sacramentis}, 2.16.5. “Quod et beatus Augustinus et beatus Gregorius incorporeos spiritus dicunt pena corporalis ignis posse cruciari, ista uidetur etiam affirmari narrationi.”  
\textsuperscript{129} \textit{Tractatus}, 122, ll 62-65.  
\textsuperscript{130} \textit{Tractatus}, 65-73, l 45; \textit{De Sacramentis}, 2.16.2, 553, ll 16-20. Hugh’s similar assertion is quoted and translated at the beginning of this chapter. The \textit{Tractatus} adds, “Vnde et in hac narratione a corporali et mortali homine spiritualia dicuntur videri quasi in specie et forma corporali.”}
because the essential dynamic found in the *De sacramentis* is the same one which occurred to him as he thought through the knight’s story of bodily descent into the spiritual world of images. Owein’s journey invites an agitation of the mind, a simultaneous assertion of contradictory elements, prompting a dialogue of confrontation between “assertion with doubt and doubt with assertion.” In the movement between these poles, faith is spun like a fiber. As Hugh explains, on account of the variety of language “we should not depart from the simplicity of believing.” It is this belief alone that offers a potential escape from the realm of imperfect signification highlighted so forcefully in this tale of a mortal man walking into the spiritual world. This realm of imperfect signification, where signs fail to accurately reflect back to their exemplars, leads to the spiritual world’s apprehension through stories whose particulars try the mind of mortal beings. In using the describable to speak the indescribable apparent contradictions proliferate. Faith inhabits this same place of imperfect or even defeated description, and it is also within this interim between fall and redemption that Peter’s revelations function.

Between the current, fallen world and the eschaton, fire presents itself as a point of continuity. This fire will torment those who have become eternally estranged from God, or serve as a gateway to those transcending sin. For the damned, confirmed in their unlikeness, their bodiless experience will literally merge with their final torment in bodies made anew. Those to be purged will have their unlikeness removed in this flame, and they will go on to joys that cannot be described. This fire, paradoxically, bridges the entire space between the present and the eschaton, burning in some way inside a place that is not a place and tormenting beings that cannot burn. This fire also bridges the space between disembodiment and re-embodiment. This continuity is a fallen continuity, accessible, indeed conceivable, to human beings in the present life. In our study of what is revealed in the *Book of Revelations* it is perhaps the one thing

131 Justice, “Did the Middle Ages Believe,” 13.
described most accurately. The exact particulars of this fire, however, are not fully comprehensible, remaining imperfectly known. At its most literal, the Other World is populated by likenesses, or images, but the fire is more than image or likeness. Taken in a wider context, this fire remains, like these images, an expression of the fallen state and its epistemological weaknesses and failings. Perhaps what the stubborn corporeality of otherworldly fire most powerfully represents is the return of the body and matter along with the threats and promises that lie inside the ideas of matter and embodiment as well as their continuity. A fully satisfactory account of these elements in relation to the world to come is not possible.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have identified some of the ways the excerpts in the *Book of Revelations* testify to the existence of doubtful things. In its pages, we have seen angels and human souls and witnessed the rewards of the blessed and the punishments of the wicked. Beyond the existence of these beings, blessings, and torments, we have also found testimony to their activities and the ways the living can interact with them. The fate of an individual in the hereafter arises from his or her actions in life. After death, those needing and deserving purgation can still benefit from the activities of the living. The stories found in the collection provide proofs of all of these assertions. The need for proof arises from the fact that all of these phenomena normally lie outside observation during regular human life. They were not always so inaccessible. As a result of sin, humanity lost its direct knowledge of the spiritual world and became largely dependent on an epistemology based upon the body and its senses.

According to the twelfth-century authors discussed above, this sensory epistemology, necessitated by sin, continued into the Other World. Revelations do not reveal the spiritual world as it really is. Likewise, the souls of the dead, at least initially, utilize these same limited and
imperfect ways of knowing. Upon separation from the body, the soul immediately looks within itself to find the images of the world which it had known. Through these images it experiences joys or sorrows according to its measure. As the final stains of sin are purged away, these images of worldly things disintegrate, and the soul can finally regard the spiritual world as it really exists. The language of visions and revelations found in Peter’s collection follows this itinerary for souls in the hereafter. Indeed these images are especially appropriate for those still living within the world to understand.

I have placed this trajectory for the experience of both visionaries and the separate soul in the context of the *regio dissimilitudinis*, or realm of unlikeness. The effects of sin both necessitate and limit the materials in the collection. The limits of regular human experience give rise to the doubts which are assuaged, but also determine the medium of this communication. This communication remains firmly associated with and limited by the very epistemological restrictions that have inspired it. This same space, defined by its failings and the desire for transcendence, is also the dwelling place of faith. This “interim between an origin always already lost and a consummation never yet enjoyed” plays host to visionary narratives, which testify to the reaching desire for the experience of God as well as the inability to contain this divinity within the text or the discourse it records. In this relationship, uncertainty remains a central facet of the human approach to God, especially the revelations and stories that make the invisible spirit sensible to fallen humanity.

Approaches to twelfth-century doubt can benefit from a deeper appreciation of the relationship between doubting and believing, that appears in the *Book of Revelations*. In her study of doubt in the long twelfth century, Sabina Flanagan has suggested that belief or faith

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“exclud[e] any degree of doubt or uncertainty.” Such a statement arises easily from the reading of sources that do not describe in close detail the actual process of belief as encountered by individuals, as well as what medieval thinkers took to be the historical causes of human uncertainty. While faith indeed does not admit doubt into itself, I have argued above that its very being requires the existence of uncertainty. Likewise, the very disabilities stemming from the Fall, which deny direct knowledge of spiritual things to humanity, necessitate it. The human approach to God is profoundly shaped by this aporia, and indeed the stories, as well as the religious experience, portrayed in the book of revelations play around this gap.

Paired with and inspired by the ubiquitous presence of doubt or uncertainty, the desire to surpass the normal limits of human knowledge, the need to see “something spiritual,” repeatedly arises as the motivation for individuals seeking revelations. In the recording and transmission of these experiences, neither God nor the faith that connects an individual to him can be captured in language, but perhaps what can be conveyed is the desire which acts as the moving power behind this language. This desire to know, to see, and to encounter appears repeatedly in the sources described in this chapter. This desire for a consummation that defies description, that transcends the world of likenesses in which the living and many of the dead confine themselves, motivates the telling and the recording of Peter’s revelations. It connects him to his sources and to his audiences. The following chapter examines this shared society of desire, and suggests some of the ways that it came to define twelfth and thirteenth-century literatures regarding the supernatural world.

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Chapter 4 – Revelation and Desire in the *Book of Revelations*

This chapter focuses on the desire found in the *Book of Revelations* and in wider twelfth-century literature for some kind of experiential encounter with the spiritual world. Peter’s compilation acts as a particularly powerful and informative example of approaches to the supernatural around the time of its composition, and illuminates the ways that the spiritual world participated in the emotional and devotional lives of the communities revealed in its text. The last chapter looked at what the contents of the *Book of Revelations* actually reveal and suggested a number of specific motivations that can be glimpsed through these objects of revelation. Beyond the motivations explored in the last chapter, this chapter interrogates the desire for revelation as a force in itself. Where the last chapter suggested that Peter’s revelations largely consist of mediating images that needed to be eventually transcended, this chapter explores the forces that fuel that transcendence.

Desire forms one type of mediation between the material and the immaterial. This mediation holds a long pedigree in Western culture. In the *Symposium*, Plato suggested that love or desire unites the two worlds as the ultimate attraction of the imperfect towards its perfect self.\(^1\) Christian theologians found a similar situation; Augustine suggested that will or desire (*voluntas*) mediates between memory and understanding, forming the divine image in man.\(^2\) Similarly, the desire or love, really the affective pull, of the Christian for God in Christ could draw the believer towards the divinity. This desire is ultimately transformative. If Christ serves as both way and

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destination, the desire itself for union with the divinity participates to some extent in that divinity. The desire for revelation carries with it transcendental potential, but it also brings with it all the burdens of its human, fallible origins; as a result, desire must climb, shifting its attention from the human and the carnal to the spiritual and the divine. As I will argue, in the *Book of Revelations*, this mediating desire begins as the desire to see “something spiritual.”

This desire for revelation is one way of approaching the issue of doubt and the supernatural. Peter’s preface situates the collection as a response to doubt in the existence of whatever is immaterial and unknowable through the bodily senses. The dialectic between the sensible and the insensible serves as the origin for the type of doubt Peter chooses to highlight, but these same epistemological limitations also provide the setting for their own transcendence through faith. This faith is itself set in motion through desire, as an individual focuses upon his inability to directly know the spirit and wishes to surpass this limitation. Peter’s text captures not only the desire to assuage doubt, but the desire to address the root causes that make doubt possible. In this fashion, the longing for revelation takes its place within the dialectic between the visible and the invisible, and the stories found in the *Book of Revelations* can tell us a great deal about the experience of this opposition.

The desire for revelation draws from and participates in a host of other affective bonds important to the characters and intended audiences of the *Book of Revelations*. This porous border between the desire for revelation and other aspects of individuals’ emotional lives allows Peter’s compilation to speak directly to the history of emotions in the Middle Ages, granting access to central elements of the emotional experience of religious life at the turn of the thirteenth century. I will argue that the writers, collectors, and audiences of the revelatory

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literature crystalized in Peter of Cornwall’s manuscript partook in an interrelated group of “emotional communities,” like those proposed by Barbara Rosenwein. Rosenwein argues that emotional communities essentially consist of “groups in which people adhere to the same norms of emotional expression and value – or devalue – the same or related emotions.” Peter’s expressions of doubt, affection, and other emotions illuminate such emotional communities, beginning, on its most basic level, with the Christian monastic community, focused upon the eventual experience of the presence of God.

These emotional communities can be textual, and indeed can overlap considerably with the “textual communities” proposed by Brian Stock, and Peter’s text provides an ideal illustration of this intersection. The Book of Revelations places written sources, originating over a span of many centuries, and oral sources contemporary with the author, side by side. The collection and arrangement of these sources reflect the interests and access of the compiler. What results is a crystalized moment of discourse regarding the supernatural that speaks to some of the ways these texts were read in the time of the manuscript’s composition and some of the interests that led readers to them. Peter’s stories in particular illuminate how the bonds between two individuals could function in his peers’ approach to God. The desire for God and the desire for others’ companionship and love mirror and become each other.

When Peter of Cornwall collected material for the Book of Revelations, he worked within an atmosphere alive with the desire for contact with the spiritual world. Peter’s family, friends, and acquaintances all existed in this atmosphere, and participated in a community of sorts defined by the telling and seeking out of stories that dealt with the revelation of the normally invisible. This seeking after revelation took place within the context of affective communities

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5 Rosenwein, Emotional Communities, 24-5; Stock, The Implications of Literacy, 90-92.
that consisted of both human and literary bodies. Peter’s textual community of desire for revelation drew upon centuries of Christian literature and his use of this textual community illustrates this literature’s participation in both his own life and the lives of his contemporaries.

The affective bonds between individuals, especially in the context of community, shape the inquiry to follow. Western monasticism has long maintained that the bonds between individuals could be linked to their attachment to God. Close friendships between individual monks appear as a staple in the monastic literature of the twelfth century, especially among Cistercian authors, but as Brian Patrick McGuire argues, this literature was often suspicious of the possibly divisive exclusivity of these relationships. The bond between two people can be linked to their attachment to God, but this bond always maintains the potential to privilege the human over the divine. Finding the balance between these two poles enlivens a great deal of the monastic literature produced in the course of the long twelfth century. The centrality of community in the monastic experience makes an interesting pairing with Rosenwein’s idea of emotional community and Stock’s textual community. In these stories, one can see not only the experience of emotion, but also its ordering and redirection within the structures of regular life.

This drawing together of friendship, human love, community, and the desire for God is in many senses a return to the foundational works of the medieval history of emotions. Jean Leclercq found a similar confluence of elements evident in twelfth-century France, particularly among Cistercian exegetes dealing with the Song of Songs. The expressions of love that Leclercq found, especially in the hands of Bernard of Clairvaux, recounted a transformational and spiritualizing love, in which the experience and imagery of carnal attachments played an

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7 This anxiety finds expression in chapter 2 of the Benedictine rule. Such relationships are often referred to as “particular friendships.”
essential role in the transcendence of the carnal.\textsuperscript{8} The central themes of Leclercq’s monkish love
draw upon the long tradition of the affective interrelation and blending of opposites in the
spirituality and philosophy of the Western World, what Karl F. Morrison terms “the
hermeneutics of empathy.”\textsuperscript{9}

Morrison’s hermeneutics of empathy will be instructive for my understanding of Peter’s
texts. I believe that the expressions of desire for revelation and the affective relationships among
individuals who shared this desire that appear in the \textit{Book of Revelations} outline a hermeneutic
process. This hermeneutic process is directly parallel to the one I identified regarding the use of
corporeal imagery in the last chapter. Human beings, estranged from the spiritual world,
approach it through intermediaries. These intermediaries, while in a sense existing as transitory
way stations, possess a lasting significance of their own. Through the force of human desire and
affect, illusory mimesis repeatedly mediates the way to authentic, transformative mimesis.\textsuperscript{10} In
the stories to follow, spirits will appear as embodied men, and these appearances will somehow
lead towards knowledge of the bodiless; likewise, the desire for a human will in some way lead
to the desire for a God. Within the structure of this hermeneutic process, all manner of affective
bonds become aligned to one another, especially those that may at first appear separate by their
nature. In this fashion, my inquiry into desire for experiential contact with the spiritual world
will draw upon many other desires, suggesting their potentials for unity in division.

\textbf{Part 1 - To Experience “Something Spiritual”}

\begin{flushright}
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\textsuperscript{9} Karl F. Morrison, \textit{“I am You:” The Hermeneutics of Empathy in Western Literature, Theology, and Art}
\textsuperscript{10} Morrison, \textit{“I am You,”} 91.
\end{flushright}
Peter’s excerpts from the *Life* of Godric of Finchale, found in the first book of the collection, form an ideal starting place for an inquiry into the role of desire for revelation in the *Book of Revelations*.$^{11}$ The origin of the text lay close to Peter’s own time and human contacts. The *Life* never knew a wide circulation and Peter’s excerpts from the work show a close connection to the Cistercian communities that disseminated it and suggest that the text spoke to concerns shared between him and these communities. I believe that one of these messages is the way the excerpts describe the desire to see the spiritual world, and the way this desire participates in the human approach to God. This characterization of the desire for revelation runs through other items in the collection and the works of Peter’s contemporaries. In these expressions of desire, the characters want to experience the spiritual sensually, but in the quest for this experience their bonds to other human beings prove decisive and transformative.

When Godric of Finchale entered his final illness, the monk who had long cared for him hoped to be present at the hour of his death. In the original text, this monk, likely the author Reginald of Durham himself, wanted to witness the saint’s death so that he “could more suitably describe what kind of leave-taking in the Lord came about at his death.”$^{12}$ When Peter added the story into the *Book of Revelations*, he rewrote this section, describing the monk’s desire differently. To Peter, “the monk wanted to be with the man of God while he was dying, so that he could see something spiritual around him while he was dying.”$^{13}$ In Peter’s understanding, this monk had looked forward to Godric’s death as a chance to see some manifestation of the spiritual world, and had often asked Godric to promise that he would not die unless the monk were present to see him. Godric’s response to these requests was lukewarm, arguing that he

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$^{11}$ See discussion of the text and Peter’s use of it in chapter one.
$^{13}$ LR 1.91 (89rb). “Quidam monachus custos Godrici desiderabat esse cum uiro dei cum moreretur, ut aliquid spirituale circa morientem uideret.”
could not make such a promise; only God could grant his caretaker’s wish. At length, the monk is called away from the hermit’s side by his superiors, but is indeed allowed to see “something spiritual” when he witnesses Godric’s death in a vision during the night. The young monk sees, but in a manner that participates in his relationship to the dying saint, and in a fashion which emphasizes the ultimate priority of God rather than the act of seeing.

In Peter’s understanding, this incident was a repetition of an earlier episode in Godric’s Life, replaying the saint’s own past desire to see “something spiritual.” While a younger Godric cared for the dying hermit, Ailric, his companion and senior when he first took up his hermitage, he “aspired with a very great desire to catch sight of the spirit of the old man, his friend, coming out from the body.”

14 Exhausted from caring for Ailric, Godric fears that he will fall asleep and miss his friend’s death. Before he falls asleep, Godric commands the spirit of the old hermit to remain until he can see it:

O spirit, you who were poured out into that body in the image of God and hidden away even now in the inner places of that very heart, I command you by the one triune and undivided Lord to not come out from this dwelling place, your prison, while I am ignorant through sleep, nor will you go away to the heights of Heaven unless you first allow me, relieved of the troubling weight of this body by means of sleep, to be with you.

15 Whether this command worked or not, Godric does indeed see his friend’s soul that night.

Viewed through the lens of Peter’s summaries, these episodes from the Life of Godric feature a recurrent and overwhelming desire to see the spirit. This desire is so powerful that in Godric’s own experience it becomes a command for the spiritual to appear. This desire itself develops during the saint’s journey to God, and this development leads the attention towards the

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14 LR 1.82 (85vb). “spiritum senis socii egredientem e corpore aspicere nimio desiderio affectasset.”
15 LR 1.82 (85vb); Vita Godrici, 12.36, 49-50. “O spiritus, qui ad Dei similitudinem in corpore isto diffunderis, et pectoris istius adhuc in interior concluderis, adiuro te per unum Dominum, Trinum, et Individuum, ne me per soporem ignorante de hoc habitaculi tui ergastulo recedas, neque ad alta coelorum abeas, nisi me prius de huius molis molestia, sopore mediante, relevatum, tibi considere concedas.”
true object of desire’s demand. When Godric encounters his younger counterpart, when he
himself in his turn plays the role of Ailric, the avidness which led to his earlier command has
disappeared; where once Godric ordered the soul to appear, he now suggests that trust should
instead be placed in God. The very desire once entertained by the saint has become somehow
suspect in the moments immediately before his final journey into the spirit. This suspicion
echoes Godric’s response to requests to describe the appearance of the soul he had so long ago
wished to witness. The older saint knows that the very thing he prayed to see cannot really be
seen as it actually is and hesitates to describe it.\(^{16}\) He describes the soul as a sphere, but Reginald
protests that Godric knew well that it is not any corporeal shape. The soul’s appearance as a
sphere is a tool to think with; it is a moment in a progression.\(^{17}\) Taken by itself, it is incomplete
by its nature like an allegory taken only as history. Nonetheless, the sight of his friend’s soul
moved the younger Godric, just as the sight of Godric’s soul amazes and comforts the younger
monk. Their acts of seeing are way-stations on the route to a type of knowledge beyond sight.

The desire to see seems beneficial and dangerous, best placed within a hermeneutic
progression of some kind towards God. The wisdom of the older Godric and the hunger to see so
strongly held by the younger Godric come together in this very alignment when the young monk
is miraculously brought into the presence of the dying Godric by the direct action of God
himself. While he watches the old hermit die, in fulfilment of his wish, the young monk begs
Godric to carry him, if only in memory, into the presence of God: “My father, my father,
remember me, because you are now ascending into the kingdom of your father, leaving me

\(^{16}\) LR 1.82 (86ra); Reginald of Durham, *Vita Godrici*, 12.36, 51. “De cuius forma uel specie, dum a quodam
frater nostro anxius rei certe indaginem scire vuolente, inquireretur, respondit, quod substantia animae spiritualis
nemini sit hominum perceptibilis.” See discussion in chapter three.

\(^{17}\) LR 1.83 (86va); *Vita Godrici*, 75.161, 171-72.
behind.” In the *Life of Godric*, the desire to see something spiritual appears to be part of the conversion of desire itself. This converted desire, which began with the impulse to see the spiritual creature, somehow eventually helps to carry the human with it into the uncreated divine presence. This conveyance is paradoxically facilitated through the mediation of the human.

The request “remember me” joined to a commandment to appear echoes through other chapters in the *Book of Revelations*, most particularly the agreements to return from the dead. Peter’s contacts at the Monastery of Stratford Langthorne and the priest William of Lesnes gave him a number of these stories. In each, a dying man promises to return to another who is still living. The request of the living for the dead to appear betrays an intensity reminiscent of the desire recounted in the *Life of Godric*. In one of the Stratford stories, the agreement is explicitly contractual, taking the form of a cyrograph, making the promise to appear close indeed to a command to appear. The dying promise to remember, and in so doing insure that they themselves are remembered.

The desire to see found in these pacts recalls similar expressions of desire found with particular prominence in Cistercian literature. Tom Licence has found that late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century Cistercians often fixated upon the sight of spiritual beings, particularly demons, and looked at such events as gifts from God. This concern with seeing the spiritual influenced non-Cistercian sources as many of the famous demon stories found in texts like the *Historia* of William of Newburgh actually originated among Cistercians. What Licence calls “the gift of seeing demons” is very close to the desire to see “something spiritual” that Peter

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18 LR 1.91 (89vb); *Vita Godrici*, 168.304, 321. “Pater mi, pater mi, memento mei; quia me hic dimittens, iam scandis ad regnum patris tui.”
19 LR 1.205. The story of Roger and Alexander. Please see the discussions of this story in chapter two and three.
records. Many of Peter’s sources, especially his pact stories, originated either from the Cistercian house of Stratford or the priest William of Lesnes, who himself became a Cistercian. Likewise, the *Life of Godric* came about under Cistercian influence and enjoyed its greatest popularity within the order and among its contacts. The drive to see the souls of dead friends, as well as the gift of seeing demons all reflect the longing to experience “something spiritual” as found in the Cistercian community and those touched by it.

The power of the desire for “something spiritual” to literally conjure its object seems almost sorcerous, and twelfth-century sources indeed closely associate it to magic. For example, Caesarius of Heisterbach in his *Dialogue on Miracles* tells a number of stories regarding necromancers that bear a strong similarity to episodes in the *Life of Godric* and Peter’s pacts to return from the dead. In one, a necromancer named Philip conjures demons in response to requests from a knight and a priest. Both the knight and the priest come to Philip because they wish to see these normally invisible creatures. In the case of the knight, his request comes explicitly as a result of his doubt in the existence of demons. In both cases, Philip’s conjurations work perfectly. The knight, having seen his demon, alters his life “living very carefully” afterward and never again harbours doubts. The priest, on the other hand, is dragged out of the summoning circle and dies after suffering for three days.

Caesarius suggests a similarity between the desire to see behind necromancy and the desire to see behind the pious requests of the religious. Soon after Philip’s necromancies, Caesarius tells the story of Abbot Herman of Marienstatt. Herman, inspired by a laybrother with the “gift of seeing demons,” acquires a desire to see them for himself, and after earnestly praying

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21 Please see the discussion of sources in chapter one. William’s conversion is revealed in LR 1.206.
to God for this favor, he does indeed see demons. After some time, Herman changes his mind and begs God for his special vision to stop.\textsuperscript{24} The motivations behind the requests made by Abbot Herman and Philip’s clients appear similar: all center on the desire to see, and the catharsis prompted through seeing. Furthermore, all suggest the transformative after-effects of sight.

Pacts to return from death, like those recounted in the \textit{Book of Revelations}, and the necromantic conjuration of the dead or the summoning of other spiritual creatures spring from a similar impulse, but they diverge in a number of essential respects. Catherine Rider has interrogated the resemblance between pacts to return from death and necromancy, identifying a few key elements that differentiate a “licit pact” from other illicit conjurations. Firstly, a licit pact almost always features a powerful and enduring emotional bond between the living and the dead.\textsuperscript{25} Secondly, a licit pact distinguishes itself by an emphasis on God’s permission and a corresponding recognition that the desire to know the fates of individuals in the afterlife has limits.\textsuperscript{26} In Rider’s argument, the difference between acceptable pacts and magical conjuration rests upon the particular constellation of three elements: the relationships between human beings, the human desire to know, and the acknowledgement of God.

The orientation of a common desire makes the difference between the prompting of revelation and magical conjuration. Rider’s observations parallel the difference between the desire to see conveyed by the young Godric and the reticence expressed by the old Godric. The power of desire must take God as its object and not the sight of the normally invisible for the sake of itself. As Richard Kieckhefer notes, the “subtle but crucial” distinction between a saint

\textsuperscript{24} Caesarius, \textit{Dialogus miraculorum}, 5.5, 3: 966, 68, 70, 72, 74, 76, 78.
\textsuperscript{25} Catherine Rider, “Agreements to Return from the Afterlife,” in \textit{The Church, the Afterlife and the Fate of the Soul. Papers Read at the 2007 Summer Meeting and the 2008 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society}, Peter Clark and Tony Claydon, eds. (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), 175.
\textsuperscript{26} Rider, “Agreements to Return from the Afterlife,” 181-2.
and a necromancer “is essentially that between reverence for the noumena behind the phenomena and fascination with noumenal beings made phenomenal.” Desire’s power acts as a force in itself, an element that must be directed, even converted, from its original nature. Ungoverned, fallen desire for the creature becomes an essential component of what may be called magic, while converted desire pulls the individual towards God.

This consideration of the desire to see something spiritual found in the excerpts from the life of Godric has set the stage for a more detailed exploration of other central chapters in the Book of Revelations. The stories to follow all feature the same progression for the object of desire identified in the discussion of Godric’s excerpts. This progression aligns with the difference I have suggested between the sorcerous and pious desires to see. Not only do these stories feature a strong suggestion that the object of attention should shift to the noumena behind the phenomena, but in this process the bonds between actors, their affective relationships, play a central role. Rider’s observation that stories regarding licit pacts to return from the dead often seem to stress the personal relationships between their characters points towards an essential dynamic between the desire to see the spirit and the affective bonds between people.

Part 2 - In the Likeness of a Man: The Dead and Mediation in the Book of Revelations

The desire for revelation overlaps and coexists with the desire for other human beings and the desire for the experience of God. In some of the most moving and original chapters of the Book of Revelations, the dead act as mediators between the living and the divine. In these

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28 This reading holds a pedigree leading back to Augustine, who viewed the signs produced by demons in response to conjurations or superstitious observances as serving only to separate the believer from God, see De doctrina Christiana, 2.23.
instances, the personal relationships between the dead individual who appears and the living visionary play a central role in drawing the visionary towards God. In these stories, the emotional bonds between individuals draw lines between the visible and the invisible and the living and the dead. The power of these relationships acts as a jumping off point for individuals to surpass the ordinary limits of their knowledge and literally move between worlds. The love and desire for reunion between people become a sacrament of a kind, mirroring the human bond with and desire for reunion with the divine.

This process represents the experience and enactment of central tropes found in Augustinian incarnational theology. In the Incarnation of Christ, when the divinity took up humanity it made itself present to the human bodily senses. Christ, as man, could then communicate his teachings or commandments to human beings through their senses. While God became both human and divine, the acquaintance of the believer with God as a man was incomplete. A living man viewing Christ with his bodily eyes would still see a man not God. To truly encounter God, the believer had to approach him through something other than the senses devoted to gaining knowledge of the created world. As Augustine explains:

The world therefore is not able to grasp Him, because it does not see Him nor know Him, for worldly love does not have the invisible eyes, through which the Holy Spirit is seen only invisibly.

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30 For an overview of Augustine’s thoughts regarding the journey from knowledge of a man to knowledge of God, see William H. Marrevee, The Ascension of Christ in the Works of St. Augustine (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1967), esp. 93-105.

31 Augustine, Enarrationes in Psalmos, 139.18 CCL 40, 2025 “Erat autem Deus in carne illa occultus; hominem autem posse videre homines, Deum vero non posse, quamvis in homine.”

32 Augustine, In Iohannis euangelium tractatus, 74.4. “mundus ergo eum accipere non potest, quia non uidet eum, neque scit eum. Non enim habet inuisibiles oculos mundana dilecto, per quos uideri spiritus sanctus, nisi inuisibiliter non potest.”
In order to experience God as God, the believer must surpass the visible appearance of Christ as man. When Christ ascended into Heaven, he withdrew his humanity so that his followers could make just such an approach and “attain his divinity by means of faith.” Christ as man mediates an eventual encounter with Christ as God in that his appearance as man awakens a faith which allows an approach towards the divinity as it is. What begins as love for a man must become a different kind of love, a love converted away from the appearance of worldly things to something else, something beyond the human.

The affection for a man becomes something more through the agency of the divinity itself. The Holy Spirit enables the faith that serves as the invisible and immaterial connection between the believer and the divinity. This gift of the Holy Spirit turns human affection into divine affection. It makes the carnal spiritual, and converts love. To Augustine, Jesus’ promise, “Peace I leave you” (John 14:27), refers to this conversion of carnal love into true, spiritual love: “He left peace with us so that we here would love as well in return.” The appearances of the dead in some of Peter’s stories hint at a similar process of mediation aimed at the conversion of earthly bonds into spiritual ones, and in this progression Peter’s stories once again interrogate the Christian dialectic between the visible and the invisible.

A good number of the revelations authored by Peter of Cornwall himself utilize Christ’s incarnation and ascension as their central trope, but instead of Christ as mediator, these stories utilize apparitions of the beloved dead. The process of mediation remains essentially familiar, consisting of the desire for the absent. What was for Plato the desire of the imperfect for its perfect self and for Augustine the desire of the believer for Christ is here glimpsed under the guise of desire for the absent and remembered dead. The goal remains, of course, for desire itself

34 Augustine, In Iohannis euangelium tractatus, 77.3. “pacem relinquit nobis, ut etiam hic inuicem diligamus.”
to change, or perhaps enlarge, to become the very thing it loves. As Peter tells the reader in the preface to the compilation, the goal is to read the text not only with the eyes of the body but also with the eyes of the heart.\(^{35}\) The process set in motion by the body of the text and the images of its characters, just as by the visible body of Christ, will lead to a transformative spiritual connection with the divine that surpasses the world and its figures.

**William and John: Connecting, Separating, and Transforming**

William, the parish priest of Lesnes, made a habit of asking dying men to return to him from the Other World. He makes such requests three times in the first book of the collection. His informants consist of two regular canons, one of them the sub-prior of Holy Trinity priory, and his young servant named John.\(^{36}\) Of these three, the revelation brought by John the servant stands out.\(^{37}\) The two canons bring stories of otherworldly purgation and eventual redemption, while John recounts his damnation. That the only layman in the group should be the one who is damned is not extraordinary, but it is John’s story that is most closely associated with William’s own conversion to the monastic life, not the hopeful tales of the regular canons. The story of William and John is different and this difference originates in the relationship between them.

The connection between John and William, which was between a master and a servant in life, becomes one formed of shared secrets in death. John had served as William’s servant before he became deathly ill and died around the age of twenty. He returns, as promised, about thirty days after his death around the ninth hour, while William is awake in bed. The priest is immediately struck by fear at his arrival, and when he asks how John fares the young man responds that he is “in the inferno.” He has been sent there for stealing from Holy Trinity Priory, a crime that he kept secret in life. John’s return from the dead illustrates a number of points

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\(^{35}\) LR (2ra), “Quem librum siquis non minus oculis cordis quam corporis perlegere studerit….”

\(^{36}\) These are: LR 1.186, 1.204, and 1.206.

\(^{37}\) LR 1.206 (126rb-127ra).
regarding confession before death, and access to otherworldly purgation, but here my interest lies in the relationship between the damned servant and the priest. After hearing of his old servant’s damnation, William asks about his own future fate, and John replies that “a place, baths, and intolerable scourgings” have been prepared for him in Hell. These torments stand ready because of a “certain sin” that the priest had thought about committing but had never yet actually carried out. The priest had told no one about his desire to carry out this sin, but as John names it, William is amazed that the young man knows his “secret.”

The two men share the “secret” of an unnamed sin, and this sin connects not only them but also the world of matter and the world of the spirit. As John describes William’s desire and the torments this desire would merit if carried out, the priest actually begins to feel these punishments, even though he is still alive:

> When John had said that scourges had been prepared for him in the inferno, the priest, it is wondrous to say, after he heard the word scourgings, felt these very scourgings happen to him on his own body, and, as he himself most truthfully testified to me, he endured immense pain in the places of the scourgings for the entirety of that month.

For a brief time, both men share in damnation.

While the sin William had intended to commit remains unspoken, the suggestion of a homoerotic context is not unreasonable. The young servant’s age, the fact he appears to the priest while he is in bed, and the very unspeakable nature of the sin itself is suggestive. The speaking

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38 For confession and purgation, see the discussion in chapter three.
39 LR 1.206 (126va); Sharpe and Easting, 264. “Respondit sedem illius et balneum et flagella intolerabilia cotidie in inferno preparari.”
40 LR 1.206 (126 va-b); Sharpe and Easting, 264. “et quia in animo proposuisset, se quoddam peccatum commissurum quod nemini adhuc reuelauerat, sed penes se in corde occultum tenebat. Et ut sacerdos de penis sibi preparatis certus fieret, peccatum illius adhuc in corde occultum, sed facere proposuerat, manifeste nominavit. Ammirans autem sacerdos quomodo ille potuerit animi sui nosse secretum.”
41 LR 1.206 (126vb); Sharpe and Easting, 264. “Ubi autem Johannes dixerat in inferno ipsi preparari flagella, sacerdos quod mirum dictum uidetur, auditu uocabulo flagellorum, iam ipsa flagella in corpore suo sibi fieri persensit, et, ut ipse uerissime mihi testificatus est, per totum illum mensum dolorem nimium in loco flagellorum in corpore suo sustinuit.”
42 For sex between two men as “the unmentionable sin,” see Mark Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 111. For treatment of the terminology in a larger
aloud of this sin is like a conjuration that opens a window to Hell. What indicates this possibility most strongly, however, is the way that this sin connects the two men infernally; the desire for the unnamed sin literally joins William to damnation in the form not only of physical pain, but also the apparition of John. Of course, the sin may be unnamed simply because William was still living when Peter wrote the *Book of Revelations*.\(^{43}\) I believe, however, that the possibility of such a reading is important, especially in the context of a string of stories recounting the ways that personal bonds can eventually help to direct the individual towards God. In this case, one could find here the suggestion of the kind of human relationships that bring about precisely the opposite outcome, and how even this desire can be reformed.

 Warned about the impending results of both the sins he had committed and the sins he had considered committing, William alters his life soon after John’s return. While John is damned and cannot undergo purgation in the Other World, William, in a sense, is purged in his place. The priest of Lesnes feels the marks left by his scourging for thirty days, the same length of time as the tricenary, which as another of Peter’s stories suggested, was the length of time most Cistercians could expect to spend in Purgatory. William combines this thirty-day suffering with appropriate fear, penance, and a change of life, committing himself to the Cistercian order.

 Peter of Cornwall ends the chapter with a quotation of Philippians 3:13 that recalls his preface to the collection, suggesting that William’s transformation is exactly the type of change he hopes the collection will inspire in the reader. As Philippians suggests, “forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching out to those things which are to come,” Peter reveals that William still lives among the Cistercians, “leading a religious life and daily extending himself

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\(^{43}\) Peter makes this claim at the end of the chapter. Please see the quotation in the note below.
towards those things which are to come.” Laid side-by-side with the wording of the preface, the suggestion is clear:

Should someone devote themselves to reading through this book not less with the eyes of the heart than with the eyes of the body, he will not doubt that God, the angels, and human souls exist, and that they [human souls] live after the death of the body. And by the examples of the holy fathers, forgetting those things which are behind, he will reach out to things to come, and by reviewing the wonders of invisible things he will grasp with admiration how wonderful is God in his saints.

William’s confrontation with the spiritual world and the punishments and rewards in it, is parallel to the experience of the reader of the compilation. Peter hopes that just as William was converted, so too will be those who encounter his book. Through the prompting of the written stories, the readers’ orientation will be changed, and they will fix their attention upon the future beyond the world and most importantly upon God. Through a manifestation of the invisible, their desire will be converted.

The story of William and John blurs the line not only between the two men but also between the reader and the characters, suggesting that William’s desire to see, which leads to his repeated requests for the dead to return, is like that entertained by the reader who pores over the collection seeking example after example of the numinous made phenomenal. William, John, and the reader are drawn together by the text, and, although John is at the same time paradoxically forever excluded, his very exclusion reforms and transforms William, and hopefully the reader, into something else. The blurring and mixing brought about through

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44 LR 1.206 (127ra); Sharpe and Easting, 266. “Et revelationis sibi facte non inmemor, penitentiam agens ordini Cisterciensi se contulit, in quo adhuc uiiens, uitam duicit religiosam, ad ea que anteriora sunt cotidie se extendens.” Philippians 3:13 reads, “Fratres, ego me non arbitror comprehendisse. Unum autem: quae quidem retro sunt obliuiscens, ad ea vero, quae sunt priora, extendens meipsum.”

45 LR (2ra). “Quem librum siquis non minus oculis cordis quam corporis perlegere studuerit, Deum et angelos et animas hominum esse, et post mortem corporis uiuere non dubitabit; et exemplis sanctorum patrum, que retro sunt obluiuiscens, ad anteriora extendet, et ad mirabilia rerum inuisibilium percurrendo, quam mirabilis sit Deus in sanctis suis ipse cum ammiratione perpendet.”
participation in the shared community of the text promises sincere transformation and redemption.

**Roger and Alexander: Promise and Consummation**

While the relationship between William and John is haunted by the specter of secrets that condemn, the story of Roger and Alexander features a shared secret that exalts. This ultimately positive and redemptive secret, nevertheless, plays with ambiguities and uncertainties, especially those present within a promise and the faith required on the part of those who believe in promises. The story of Roger and Alexander above all else explores the invisible affect that bonds human beings to each other and also to God. Their relationship provides an excellent example of the kinds of personal friendships that existed between Cistercian monks and how these friendships functioned in their spiritual lives. The relationship between Roger and Alexander is remarkable for the way it highlights the kinds of interactions that occurred between lay-brothers and choir monks in the years before increasing restrictions on contact between these two groups came into full effect.46

The two men lived at the Cistercian monastery of Stratford Langthorne, and theirs is one of a number of stories Peter of Cornwall drew from the members of that house. While earlier chapters have examined the circumstances behind the vision itself and the ways that it employs the image of the human body, the inquiry here will focus on the affective states behind the pact the two men make.47 The intense friendship between the two monks serves as the engine that not

46 James France finds this story exemplifies the kinds of interactions possible between lay-brothers and choir monks, as well as the apparent relaxation of the rules regarding silence, *Separate but Equal: Cistercian Lay Brothers, 1120-1350* (Collegeville: Cistercian Publications, 2012), 176-77. My thanks to Nick Johnston for drawing my attention to this study. For lay-brothers’ ideal observance of silence, see Chrysogonus Waddell, ed., *Cistercian Lay Brothers: Twelfth-Century Usages with Related Texts* (Cîteaux: Commentarii cistercienses, 2000), 177-79. Restrictions between the two classes of monks tightened in the late twelfth century. In 1188 noblemen were obliged to enter the order as choir monks only, ending the earlier mixed social origins of the lay-brothers. France, *Separate but Equal*, 19-20.

47 Please see discussions in chapters two and three.
only allows one of them to return from the dead but also to bring the human closer to the divine. Various doubts and anxieties characterize both the human and spiritual levels of this process; indeed, the two are very deliberately parallel.

The agreement between Roger and Alexander to return from death stems from their friendship. As novices together, the two young men developed a close bond that lasts for their entire lives. The two share “all the secrets” of their hearts with one another, and the fact that Alexander ended his life as a monk priest does not diminish the connection he bears to Roger who remains a laybrother. When the inspiration for the pact occurs to Alexander, he sees the emotional bond between himself and Roger as the motive force that will not only insure the agreement is carried out, but as the power that even makes the pact possible. As he says:

Roger, since I rely most on your love, in as much as I presume you would do much for me in this transitory life, if I had need of your help and advice, let us make a pact between us of the kind I have heard that some others have made, that is, that whichever of us dies first, the dead one should come and make known to the survivor how he left this life, and by what officers or ministers he was taken up when leaving here, and whether the place of torments or of rest has received him. 

They agree that the return from death should take place on the first night, or thirty days, or one year after death. The friendship and the promise this relationship enables between these two men will literally cross worlds, conjuring the dead into the presence of the living.

The two confirm their agreement first by faith alone [primo fide] but later by sign in the form of a written contract [cyrographo]. This contractual progression recalls the historical etymology of the word sacrament or “sacramentum.” Most basically, “sacramentum” represents
a “sacred oath,” or promise, a visible sign of an invisible and supposedly inviolate trust. This trust between the two men takes center stage in the rest of the story. Alexander emphasizes this trust when he concludes that since he is the one who initiated the pact he will be the first to die. He assures Roger that “a firm faith in the pact, which I promise to fulfill” should stand between them. Continuing the sacramental language that surrounds their agreement, this pact is their private mystery or “mysterium,” literally an unseen bond, an immaterial thing, that exists between them both. In this relationship, Roger must place his belief in Alexander’s ultimate fulfillment of their covenant. Of this consummation, he currently possesses only signs and not the things themselves. This trust cannot be seen; it cannot be empirically proven. The faith in his human friend runs parallel to the faith he cultivates in the divinity.

Roger’s faith in Alexander is not absolute; in fact, it is an anxious faith, defined by the possibility that the hoped for revelation will fail to occur. Connected to the fear that the revelation will fail is Roger’s concern that the bond of friendship and memory which he shares with Alexander may have weakened with time. While Alexander is dying, Roger rushes to his bedside:

Dearest Alexander…because I see that you are very soon to depart this life, I beseech you by the testimony of the divine name, that you maintain the agreement, with faith exchanged (fide interposita), in the way that we promised between us.

Some of the other monks are shocked by Roger’s presumption, including Benedict, the future Abbot of Stratford, and friend of Peter of Cornwall, who exclaims, “God forbid!” and suggests

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50 LR 1.205 (124vb); Sharpe and Easting, 236. “Set stet inter nos firma fides pacti quam me polliceor seruaturum.”

51 LR 1.205 (124vb-125ra); Shape and Easting, 238. “‘Frater,’ inquam, ‘Alexander karissime, ex quo te uideo ex hac uita quantocius migraturum, te sub contestatione diuini nominis interpello quatinus secundum quod nos inuicem compromisimus, fide interposita conserves sponsionem.’”
that Alexander be absolved from such a terrible promise. The current abbot, instead, decides that God’s will should be allowed to play out, and the promise is left in place.\footnote{LR 1.205 (125ra); Sharpe and Easting, 238. “Quod dum nonnulli me super hoc presumptionis redarguerent, ‘Absit,’ inquit Benedictus tune prior… Et dominus abbas, ‘Quinimmo, fiat uoluntas Dei.’”}

The abbot’s reference to God’s will reminds the reader of the divinity’s priority. Just as Godric admonished the young monk in the excerpt from the \textit{Life of Godric}, so too does the Abbot of Stratford caution Roger that if his desired revelation occurs, it is because of the will of God and not the power of his own will. In these recurrent insistences in the divinity’s priority, one can hear the repetition of Augustine’s similar suggestion found in the \textit{Care to be Taken for the Dead}. Any appearance of the dead is due to divine power and the divine will rather than the individual. The individual desires to see, but this desire alone, unaligned to the divinity’s own will, brings about nothing.

After Roger’s earnest reminder to the dying Alexander, he waits worriedly for his friend to appear. Roger’s worry derives in particular from the fact that Alexander did not appear on the first night as the pact suggested he could. Roger spends many sleepless nights thinking to himself “what might be able to be done about this,” and obtains expert advice from the chamberlain of the monastery as he says “lest I should be terrified if he came.” At length, Roger becomes confident, and no longer worried, he actually hopes for Alexander to come. It is only at this point, around thirty days after Alexander’s death, that he returns according to the agreement.

What kind of instruction the chamberlain has given Roger becomes apparent in the drama around Alexander’s first appearance. While Roger lies awake in bed, Alexander manifests as a great weight on Roger’s back. Roger makes the sign of the cross, and murmuring “I believe in God” finds himself able to move with ease. He then conjures whatever it is that has come to him:

\begin{quote}
I conjure you, whatever you are, in the name of the Lord, that if you are of the adverse party, you shall withdraw from here doing no harm. But if you are from the party of God,
\end{quote}
I call you to witness by the virtue of his name to make faithfully manifest what you are, and from where and for what you have come.53

The chamberlain’s advice works perfectly, and the entity reveals its identity when it answers “I am he, that brother, your Alexander.”54

Before the entity identifies itself as “your Alexander,” its arrival seems suspiciously like a demonic night assault. The way this appearance plays out forms an instructive contrast to the appearance of John to William of Lesnes as well as the earlier conjuration of Godric. Roger commands whatever has appeared to take form and communicate to him. What first manifests is a phenomenon without form or meaning and Roger demands that the thing present itself as something with hermeneutic potential. This is ultimately a command to take up form and language through the power of language, in this case through the virtue of the divine name, or the ultimate exemplar of the potential of language as sign. The visitor obeys, becoming Alexander. Not only does he speak, but he takes on the bodily form of the dead Alexander when Roger suddenly sees his friend as he was in life and hears him speaking with the same voice.

The shape, or image, of his Alexander is itself a kind of communication; like the words they speak to one another, the image of Alexander is a sign. The clarity of the use of Alexander’s appearance as sign, parallel to the words he comes to speak, grows with time. This familiar face and voice explain to Roger the answers to the questions they posed to one another as novices, and at the end of the interview when Roger asks if he can join Alexander in the next life; his friend tells him that he must wait. In an echo of Philippians 3:13, he must remain in the present

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53 LR 1.205 (125ra-b); Sharpe and Easting, 238. “‘Coniuro te,’ inquam, ‘quicquid es, in nomine Domini, ut si partis fueris adversse, nichil nocens, quamocuius hinc recedas. Si uero ex parte Dei fueris, te sub uirtute nominis eius obtestor, quatinus quid sis uel unde uel ad quid ueneris fideliter manifestes.’”
54 LR 1.205 (125rb); Sharpe and Easting, 238. “‘Ego sum,’ inquit, ‘ille frater tuus Alexander.’”
life and make “progress for the better.”\textsuperscript{55} Roger cannot join his friend as he is now, but only at some future point. Alexander, himself fulfilling a promise, affirms that this future moment will come as promised.

When one year has passed, Alexander comes again, and there is no demonic ambiguity. He appears as a ball of light, not as the image of a man, and Roger only knows his friend from the familiar voice which he still recognizes. The image of Alexander as a sign becomes more and more abstract, as if it is leading Roger away from attachment to the image of a human being towards something else, something insubstantial, incorporeal, more than human. At the end of this appearance, Alexander again defers a reunion with Roger, telling him to continue “manfully” in the world until his time. Finally, Alexander suggests that he may come again, leaving his memory as an active mediator for Roger, one that at any moment could bring him into contact with the spiritual world.

The relationship between Roger and Alexander bears powerful sacramental and incarnational resonances. The two begin as human beings frustrated in their separation from the spiritual world. To cross this divide, they form an agreement that one will cross over from the spirit back into the world of matter to communicate with his friend. Just as in the Incarnation of Christ, this human that appears to bridge, and to some extent repair, the alienation between living humans and the spirit withdraws after a time. As Jesus ascended into Heaven, Alexander’s familiar shape dissolves into light. What is first approached in the terms of this world, in the likeness of a relationship to a man, must become an immaterial union. As humanity is left to

pursue this union through faith in the present world, so too is Roger. In this pursuit, the human mediator(s) are both present and absent, and the very liminality of a familiar figure, which bridges the space between worlds, enables true mediation.

**Via the Son: Ailsi and Pagan**

Perhaps the most striking single section of the *Book of Revelations* is the journey of Peter’s grandfather, Ailsi, to the Other World with his dead son named Pagan as his guide. In this story, Peter’s own family and his familial loves and memories converge with the other stories and memories held in the *Book of Revelations*. The account of Ailsi and Pagan brings together many of the different strands identified in the visions of Godric, William and John, and Roger and Alexander. Ailsi’s vision in particular illustrates the ways that various affective experiences and associations participate in the human approach to God. Deeply embedded in these associations are many doubts, uncertainties, and resultant anxieties. This anxious energy characterizes the convergence of a number of desires and breathes life into the text.

The first of these desires is that of a father for his dead son. On its most basic level, the *Vision of Ailsi* features a bereaved parent who does not know where his child is or how he fares. The loss of his son does indeed have profound emotional repercussions for Ailsi as his grandson explains:

> After his death, the man of God [Ailsi] began to think within himself regarding the state of the future world. But because, in as much as he was a layman, he neither knew anything about it, nor was there anyone else who could explain it to him, he remained very anxious (*nimis anxius*). And the less he knew about the punishments of the wicked and the rewards of the good, he was all the more eager to know about them.\(^{56}\)

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Ailsi does not appear to doubt that there are rewards and punishments after death; it is their particulars that he appears not to know. Ailsi’s grief at his son’s death flows into a desire to know born out of his ignorance.

Pagan’s fate within these unknown joys or torments would appear to be another principal concern or desired information. Peter explains that Pagan took his name from the fact that he remained unbaptized until the age of twelve. Soon after this delayed baptism, he died. Various modern readers have been troubled by this seemingly inexplicable delay. Ailsi, in Peter’s description, was a remarkably pious man, who regularly saw and conversed with St. Stephen to the point where he regarded him as a personal friend. Indeed, Sharpe and Easting, following Nicholas Orme, suggest that Peter may have inherited a fanciful family history, and that the name Pagan was a perfectly acceptable Christian name whose common form was Pain.57 Nonetheless, Peter believed this likely faulty etymology, and it plays a central role in the story he told about his grandfather and his uncle.

In Peter’s mind, Pagan’s salvation hinges on the ritual of baptism performed just before his death. When Ailsi becomes concerned regarding “the state of the future world,” is he perhaps interrogating this ritual’s efficacy? In some ways this appears to be the case, but as I will argue, indirectly. Baptism addresses the stain of original sin. Pagan dies as a child, as Peter says “snatched up” by the Lord “lest evil alter his soul.”58 Having had so little opportunity for sin in such a short life, Pagan’s problem was the innate inherited defects of the human condition due to original sin. Immediately after baptism, his chances of salvation would appear very good indeed.

58 LR 1. (26rb); Sharpe and Easting, 202. “Quem cito post baptismum rapuit sibi Deus, ne malitia mutaret animum eius.”
Pagan’s name and time of death principally work to raise awareness of the presence of original sin and its effects. Foremost among these lingering effects, as they have appeared in the *Book of Revelations*, is a deficient epistemology that does not allow humanity direct access to spiritual realities such as God. Instead, spiritual things appear through mediating images or signs, like the apparently corporeal things visionaries see when they travel outside their bodies. Pagan’s name and baptism also broach the topic of the ways the disabilities stemming from original sin can be addressed through ecclesiastical rituals and observances, and I believe that it is the means and efficacy of these reparative approaches to sin that Ailsi is interrogating.

Beyond Pagan’s salvation, I would suggest that Ailsi is principally asking a more personal question, spurred by the death of his son. Ailsi, a man who had lived for a long time in the world, had more to worry about than his son who died before evil had time “to alter his soul.” Living as a layman, could Ailsi realistically expect salvation? In other words, would he ever see his son again? Instead of the fate of Pagan, the question then becomes what is the fate of the lay-faithful who participate in the sacraments and rituals appropriate to their station, but do not devote themselves to a completely religious life? C. S. Watkins suggests reading the vision as a demonstration of the answer to precisely this question.59

The twelfth century was a period during which access to Heaven became more widely available for the laity. Through the idea of purgation after death, those who did not die immaculate could nonetheless look forward to an eventual salvation. Furthermore, suffrages for the dead could reduce the length and severity of these purgatorial punishments, and in this economy of suffrages the living and the dead would be brought together in regular exchanges. This contact could be both figurative and literal. The explosion of ghosts in twelfth-century literature, returning to describe the Other World and ask the living to intercede for them, 59

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represented one way that the opening up of salvation to the laity resulted in a very real increase in the contact of the living with the dead. Ailsi’s vision takes place in this context. In the course of his revelation, Ailsi, the relatively wealthy landholder, sees the system of purgation in the beyond, and is assured that regular people can indeed be saved.

Before he receives the revelation that those who die somewhat stained by sin can be redeemed, Ailsi doubts. The very language of the story reveals important facets of Peter’s conception of doubt and its roles. The word choices and expressions used to describe Ailsi’s emotional states resonate strongly with the lexicographic and syntactic characteristics of twelfth-century expressions of doubt identified by Sabina Flanagan. Flanagan finds that doubt expressions, in the twelfth-century context, covered much of the same ground as they often do in English, indicating principally uncertainty “evoked in the presence of competing possibilities between which a choice has to be made.” In her analysis, the lexicography of doubt evident in this period often expresses a state of flux in which one moves “from one opinion to the other” without a certain reason to select one to the exclusion of others.60 These expressions often foreground notions of movement, doubleness, and hesitation in the course of movement; instability and wavering lie at their heart. Doubt exists on a spectrum, ranging from total denial to slight uncertainty. Variations in a particular doubt expression can indicate where on the spectrum it may lie, but also the experience of doubt itself is often figured as a movement along this very scale. Peter’s language and descriptions figure Ailsi’s doubt and uncertainty in exactly these terms.

Ailsi’s physical actions at the onset of the vision illustrate the mental processes of doubt in the experience of faith. He sees himself as a pilgrim on the way to Jerusalem. After

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descending into a misty valley, he becomes separated from his companions. Ailsi “yells and screams after his fellow pilgrims,” but receives no reply. ⁶¹ Realizing he is alone, Ailsi “extends himself to future things” in yet another repetition of Philippians 3:13 and calls upon the help of God and St. Stephen. ⁶² Extending himself, he does not despair, but rather continues on his route until he comes to a great river that is so “vast,” “wide,” “long,” and obscured with dense fog that he cannot see across it. ⁶³ Unable to cross, he “anxiously (anxius) decides to walk along the riverbank, now here and now there (nunc hac nunc illac), up and down (sursum et iussum), if by chance he could find a bridge” so that he can cross to the other side. Ailsi finds no bridge, and tired and “almost desperate and ready to give up” he looks “here and there” (huc illucque) “anxiously” (anxius) demanding help from God or St. Stephen. ⁶⁴ St. Stephen, whom Ailsi had seen many times before in human form does not appear. Instead, Ailsi’s wanderings are summarized and then terminated by the arrival of Pagan, his dead son:

When therefore his soul was fluctuating doubtfully here and there (huc illucque), behold the above said boy, namely his son Pagan, stood before him. ⁶⁵

Pagan explains that God had sent him to his father’s aid. After a brief reunion, Pagan carries his father on his back across the river to the places of purgation and finally to the rewards of the just.

⁶¹ LR 1.6 (26va); Sharpe and Easting, 202. “cepit clamare et eiulare post socios suos, sed nemo ei respondebat.”
⁶² LR 1.6 (26va); Sharpe and Easting, 202. “In anteriora tamen se extendens.”
⁶³ LR 1.6 (26va); Sharpe and Easting, 202. “nec de uisitatione eorum desperans, et semper in itinere suo proficiens… Ubi flumen magnum uidit, sed nec latitudinem eius nec longitudinem, tum pro sua immensitate, tum pro nebulæ densitate, transuidere potuit.” Ailsi’s dutiful progress, recalls the making progress for the better enjoined in Philippians 3:13, continuing its reference.
⁶⁴ LR 1.6 (26va); Sharpe and Easting, 202. “Sed quia nec uiam uidit nec pontem inuenit, lassus et fere desperans et deficiens….” For another example of the movements of doubt expressed through the movement of objects seen in a vision, see Flanagan, Doubt in an Age of Faith, 83. Another story in the second book of the Book of Revelations, which Peter may have authored, also features wandering alongside a body of water while waiting for a revelation: 2.889 (456rb-457vb).
⁶⁵ LR 1.6 (26va); Sharpe and Easting, 202. “Cum igitur animus eius dubie huc illucque fluctaret, ecce puer predictus uidelicet filius eius Paganus coram eo astitit….”
Ailsi’s visionary pilgrimage to Jerusalem symbolizes the human approach to God in the face of deficient knowledge and the doubt this defective knowledge engenders. The pilgrimage to Jerusalem is a common motif for the eventual goal of salvation in heaven and the final direct vision of God. The mist-filled valley is the current life and the river that he cannot cross is the boundary between the material and the spiritual worlds; it is an epistemological limitation. This foggy river is so insurmountable that he almost despairs, and personally helpless he calls out to God. While trapped on one side of the boundary, he anxiously and repetitively wanders from pole to pole. This literal movement along a scale recalls medieval expressions of doubt, and it is in the course of this motion that he “extends himself” towards the divinity, dutifully continuing his progress in the face of apparent abandonment. His receptivity to the numinous does not quiet his mind, but in fact brings about the opposite. Ailsi moves from one explanation to the next without guidance or a clear reason to fix himself in place. Ultimately, he requires an intervention, a mediating-event that lies beyond human powers. This doubtful and anxious wandering comes to an apparent end with the arrival of his son from the other side.

Pagan’s arrival bears a deep Christological resonance. In Ailsi’s peregrinations on the shore, the expected bridge across the river fails to appear. In visions of the Other World, a bridge across a terrible river is a common element, and features in other visions in the *Book of Revelations* such as *St. Patrick’s Purgatory.* The reader along with Ailsi expects this bridge to be found. This expectation is frustrated when Ailsi fails to find it. In Ailsi’s vision, this river symbolizes the epistemological gap between humanity and the spiritual world, the aporia

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66 The bridge in the *Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii* is found in LR 1.1 (15va-b); Easting, *St. Patrick’s Purgatory,* 135-36. Peter included another story about an otherworldly bridge from the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great, which Patch describes as “the classic instance of the bridge,” LR 1.123 (99vb); Gregory, *Dialogues,* 4.37-38; Patch, *The Other World,* 95-6. For the bridge as motif, see Howard Rollin Patch, *The Other World: According to Descriptions in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), 374; Easting, *St. Patrick’s Purgatory,* 177.
between the visible and the invisible worlds. On the way to Jerusalem, or the salvation of mankind, this boundary needs in some fashion to be crossed. Indeed, the *Book of Revelations* is a collection of such passages, and in the case of Ailsi’s vision the dead son Pagan becomes the vehicle for this crossing.

Ailsi’s vision proposes that this bridge can, in some sense, be formed by a recognizable object of human desire, the divine mediating-event can involve the human. Pagan appears to his father, who is on the edge of despair, to carry him across the river literally upon his back. The bridge across the otherworldly river is in fact present; it is Pagan himself. Pagan’s serving as the equivalent of a bridge may be underscored by a deliberate textual parallel with *St. Patrick’s Purgatory*. In *St. Patrick’s Purgatory*, when the knight Owein begins to easily cross the otherworldly bridge with the aid of God, the demons respond by raising a clamor and throwing hooks at him in a vain attempt to pull him from the bridge. Likewise, while Ailsi flies above the places of punishment on Pagan’s back, the demons raise a great shout as they see him and try to knock him from the sky by throwing burning brands. Ailsi deflects these missiles with the help of two pots used as shields, which his son had suggested he pick up. The dead son, still present to his father through the bond of memory and of emotion, serves as the catalyst that brings Ailsi away from the knowledge of corporeal reality alone towards a closer approximation of the spiritual world. Ailsi extends himself to future things and the spiritual extends itself to him and ultimately carries him away. The connection to Pagan pulls his father across the great divide and extends the living man’s presence into the realm of the dead and the world of the spirit.

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67 Robert Easting suggests that the passage in the *Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii* serves as the base for the similar episode in the *Vision of Ailsi, St. Patrick’s Purgatory*, 246.
68 LR 1.1 (15vb); Easting, 136, ll 567-73.
69 LR (27vb); Sharpe and Easting, 210. The father and son first visit a horrific bathhouse, where Ailsi acquires the pots, before they fly over the open places of punishment.
It is the sight of Pagan, his image, and the emotional response this image brings on that is the real catalyst for the pilgrimage of Ailsi. The dead, existing in the Other World as spirits, do not have bodies. When they appear as they did in life they are only immaterial images like the stuff of dreams. Reading Peter’s words in the wake of his borrowings from Augustine’s *On the Care to be Taken for the Dead*, we cannot even be sure that Pagan, as soul, is present behind the image shown to his father. His image could be manipulated by an angel or the divinity itself for Ailsi’s benefit.\(^70\) What is more, Pagan could not himself have chosen to appear to his father; his arrival is an act of God’s will reaching out to the needful creature. What we know is that Pagan’s image has appeared in order to provoke a response from Ailsi; Pagan is a sign, just as the familiar shape of Alexander was a sign for Roger. The moving power behind this process of signification is desire, and this motivation strongly recalls the Augustinian approach to the signification of language, in which the “moving power of all language is desire,” in whose service or bondage it remains.\(^71\)

This conveyance through the image of the human son has limits. The bond between Ailsi and the son remains a human one, deeply conditioned by the circumstances and experiences of the current life. Pagan cannot take his father into Heaven to see God “face to face.” He can only serve as a prompt towards what must be an immaterial and indescribable union that cannot be accomplished through the imagery of a vision. After Pagan carries his father through the places of punishment and purgation, they arrive at a paradise filled with every imaginable pleasant thing. Pagan explains that he will wait in this paradise of apparent bounty that stands at the edge of the true Heaven until he merits entry into it. Meanwhile, his father must return to life. Despite Ailsi’s protestations that he wishes to remain in this impossibly pleasant place, Pagan stresses

\(^{70}\) Copied in the preface to the collection: LR (6vb); Augustine, *De cura*, 15-16. See discussion in chapter two.

\(^{71}\) Mackey, *Peregrinations of the Word*, 11.
that the son so briefly reunited with his father again must be withdrawn so Ailsi can approach God again in his normal life, a life in which spiritual things do not appear to the senses. Pagan’s separation from his father at the end of the vision is again a parallel to the Ascension of Christ into Heaven. Ailsi’s final goal is the true Heaven, which he has not seen, and which one suspects he cannot currently see. This final destination must be approached in terms not drawn from the living world and its delights, but in some other indescribable and immaterial way.

The emotional state in which Ailsi is left at the end of the narrative is almost a circular return to its beginning. Ailsi begins “very anxious” (*nimis anxius*) about the state of the future world, and his vision takes the form of a pilgrimage that responds to this anxiety, showing him signs about this future world. In this pilgrimage in the Other World, he sees the purgation and punishments of souls as well as the place of almost unimaginable sweetness in which his son dwells. After his enforced return to the living world from this paradise, Ailsi reflects on the joys he has apparently lost and is “very anxious” (*nimis anxius*). Ailsi’s journey is from anxiety to anxiety; the revelation he has received does not quiet his mind, but rather has riled it.

At the end of the vision, Ailsi has not attained his true object, but rather his desire has been refocused. What began with a desire to know concludes with a passionate desire for reunion, for a return to joys like those Ailsi has witnessed, and the assumption appears that this desire will transform and guide the rest of his life to facilitate his eventual return. Ailsi’s story features a conversion of this motive desire from the alleviation of doubts to the return to a lost happiness, yet the symptom of both the original and transformed desire is anxiety. The origin of this restlessness and the continuing experience of it tie into interpretations of one particular verse that Peter has privileged in each of the stories examined above: Philippians 3:13.

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72 LR 1. (28rb); Sharpe and Easting. 212. “pater a sompno excussus se in domo sua nimis anxius inuenit, quia tante amenitatis gaudia perdiderat.”
Philippians 3:13
Brothers, I do not count myself to have apprehended. But one thing I do: forgetting those things that are behind, and stretching forth myself to those things that are before. I press towards the mark, to the prize of thesupernal vocation of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:13-14).

In the stories Peter authored, Philippians 3:13 recurrently marks essential turning points in the human approach to the spiritual world. This verse appears to hold a particular significance for Peter, especially regarding the reactions he envisioned the Book of Revelations would produce in the reader. In the preface to the collection, Peter suggested that the text could help a reader who approaches it not only with his bodily eyes but also with the eyes of his heart “to forget those things which are behind” and “reach out to future things.” In the story of William and John, the appearance of the damned servant produced just such a result for William. Likewise, the apparition of Alexander suggested that Roger should continue “manfully” in this life “making progress for the better,” as the verse suggests. Finally, in Ailsi’s wanderings on the riverbank, a metaphor for human life in the world after sin, Ailsi’s extension of himself and his attention to things to come prefaced the arrival of Pagan.

Peter’s employment of the verse rests upon a long exegetical tradition as well as the particular significance given to it among some of his contemporaries. One could say that a particularly Christian “emotional community” affixed itself to this verse, and its invocation suggests a specific mental and affective state. The verse depicts the Christian life as almost an athletic contest, a race towards a goal that the athlete has not yet reached. On the way to this mark, the believer can only press ahead and persevere in the face of opposition. In this sense belief is like a spiritualized version of the great athletic spectacles of the ancient world, propelled forward by the power of an inner longing.

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73 LR 1.205 (125va); Sharpe and Easting, 240. See discussion above.
74 The athletic contest comparison occurs in a number of other verses, such as: Cor. 9:24, Galatians 5:17, 2 Timothy 4:7, etc.
Philippians 3:13 held a special significance for the Church Fathers as an expression of the Christian desire for God. They found in the verse an encapsulation of the Christian life as an incomplete pilgrimage in which the believer strives to fix his attention upon the divinity. Basil used the verse to describe how the faithful “should fulfill the commands of the Lord with insatiable desire.” Gregory of Nyssa viewed it as an essential expression of the virtuous life. In his use of the verse, Gregory drew from the exegetical work of Origen, who employed the verse prominently in his Homilies on Numbers.

Origen’s use of Philippians 3:13 in his Homilies on Numbers resonates with the uses Peter found for it in the Book of Revelations. Peter himself excerpts from several of these homilies in the collection, and it would not be unreasonable to assume his familiarity with Origen’s citations of the verse he did not borrow. For Origen, the central context for the verse is one of pilgrimage towards God. This pilgrimage involves a turning of attention from the created to the creator, or from the visible to the invisible.

In his twenty-third homily, Origen explains how the advent of Christ turned human attention from the visible to the invisible. He examines the ways in which a believer can prepare a feast for God, following Numbers 28:1-29:39, by turning his thoughts and actions towards Him. The feasts as outlined in the Old Law are really “shadows of things to come,” and must be interpreted in a spiritual sense, not according to the immediately visible letter. Origen reviews in order the allegorical meanings of the nine feasts found in Numbers. He cites Philippians 3:13

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76 Heine, Perfection in the Virtuous Life, 241.
77 LR 1.11 (54va-56vb). The homilies Peter copied from in the Book of Revelations are numbers: 1, 2, 3, and 28.
in his discussion of the ninth, and last feast, called Tabernacles. This feast occurs when God sees that the believer has fixed his heart and purpose upon future things, rather than upon the “shadow of this life.” Origen explains:

Therefore, when you are a foreigner and a pilgrim on earth and your mind is not fixed and rooted in the desires of terrestrial things, but you are ready to move quickly and you are ready always to stretch yourself out to future things until you arrive at the land flowing with milk and honey….

The state described in Philippians is one of receptivity and desire for the divine presence. While the believer “extends himself” he still remains immersed in a world filled with illusory images, in which he can only ever know truth “in part” until the final consummation and termination of life’s journey. The imperfections of the current human ways of knowing, and the hermeneutic processes these flaws engender, define Origen’s understanding of the verse.

Gregory of Nyssa expanded the trope of imperfect knowledge in his uses of the verse through the doctrine of *epektasis*. Literally “striving upward,” Gregory taught through *epektasis* that the goal of the Christian life “is the endless pursuit of the inexhaustible divine nature.” This concept, central to Gregory’s apophatic theology, maintained that God could never be known in his entirety, and each experience of his presence would simply lead to an ever-increasing desire for more. Gregory’s *epektasis* exerted a tremendous influence on Pseudo-Dionysius and through him later theologians such as John Scotus Eriugena. In the pursuit of God, both the understanding of the individual and also the individual’s desire to understand would grow infinitely. This understanding, however, would never fully possess the object of its desire; in fact, it cannot.

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79 Origen, “Homilia 23,” 11.1, 140. “Cum ergo incola fueris et peregrinus in terris et non est mens tua et radicata in desideriis terrenorum, sed paratus es ut cito transeas et paratus es extendere te semper ad anteriora usque quo peruenias ad terram fluentem lac et mel….”

The Fathers’ reading of this passage as emblematic of the life of faith as an approach to God captured the attention of twelfth-century authors. Bernard McGinn identifies *epektasis*, and its invocation in Philippians 3:13, as “one of the essential themes of Cistercian mysticism” in the twelfth century. Bernard of Clairvaux in particular, showed a clear fondness for the verse quoting it twenty-five times in his written works. Bernard draws attention to this repetition, pointing to the verse as emblematic of the spiritual progression expected of a Cistercian monk. Central to the spiritual pilgrimage is the conversion of desire and the shifting of its focus from the things of this world to what exists beyond it. In one of his sermons he writes:

And therefore you, if now you arise with the desire of heavenly things, if you take up your cot, namely your body, elevating it above terrestrial desires so that the soul is not carried away by its longing, but rather rules them, as is fitting, and carries the body where it does not wish and go; if at length you walk, forgetting those things which are behind and extending yourself to those things which are to come with the desire and purpose of making progress, you should not doubt that you are cured. For you would not be able to rise if the weight had not been alleviated to some extent, nor would you be able to take up your cot unless you were unburdened even more, nor would it be possible to walk through the fervor of conversion with the great weight of your sins.

In his exegesis of this verse, Bernard outlines a process in which “the soul stretches itself out and grows by its desires when reaching out in inner acts of loving and yearning for the gifts of God.” This act of self-extension is met by the divinity, lightening the load of sin through grace. This reciprocal action recalls the process outlined in Augustinian incarnational theology in which

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82 Farkasfalvy, “The Use of Paul by Saint Bernard as Illustrated by Saint Bernard’s Interpretation of Philippians 3:13,” 162.
83 Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermonis Diversis, ed. J. Leclercq et al. (Paris: Les éditions du cerf, 2007), sermo 25, pp. 56, 58. “Et tu ergo, si iam surgis desiderio supernorum, si grabatum tuum tollis, corpus scilicet a terrenis elevans voluptatibus, ut non feratur anima concupiscentiis eius, sed magis ipsa, ut dignum est, regat illud et ferat quo non vult, si demum ambulas, quae retro sunt obliviscens et ad ea quae ante sunt te extendens desiderio et proposito proficiendi, curatum te esse non dubites. Neque enim surgere poteras, si non aliquatenus onus esset alleviatum, nec grabatum tollere, nisi exonerates magis: nec ambulare fervore conversationis cum peccatorum gravi mole possibile est.”
84 Farkasfalvy, “The Use of Paul by Saint Bernard,” 162. Similarly, McGinn summarizes Bernard’s conception of self-extension attached to this verse as God stretching “the recipient’s capacity for a greater, but continually limited infusion of Infinite Spirit.” *The Growth of Mysticism*, 217.
the believer, united to Christ through the invisible and spiritual bonds of faith, acquires the “invisible eyes” that allow apprehension of the divinity.

In his study of Bernard’s use of Philippians 3:13, Denis Farkasfalvy finds that his use distinguishes itself from earlier commentators in two primary respects: conversion as an act of forgetting, and the understanding of “to extend oneself” (se extendere) within the anthropological concerns of the twelfth century. Forgetting the past held a special significance within an order largely composed of men who had experience of the secular world. Adult men entering the religious life had to leave behind an entire world of attachments, altering the fundamental goals and values by which they lived. This shifting of values ties into Farkasfalvy’s second observation. Bernard’s reading of Philippians 3:13 directly connects to his ideas regarding the self and self-fashioning. The desires and thoughts of the individual do matter, but they do not function alone, especially in the context of human redemption.

Bernard’s exegetical emphases appear to be shared within wider Cistercian circles. Aelred of Rievaulx also finds a process of renunciation and forgetting in the verse:

If you want the Lord with his angels to appear to you, first go out from your land, your family, and your father’s house and come into the land which the Lord has pointed out to you (Gn 12:1).

The one who follows the Lord’s directions leaves behind his possessions and no longer loves the world and the things that are in it:

He drags his mind from the memory of the world and forgetting those things which are behind extends himself to future things (Phil. 3:13) and chooses to be humble in the house of God rather than dwell in the tabernacles of sinners (Ps 83:11).

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85 Farkasfalvy, “The Use of Paul by Saint Bernard,” 166.
86 Bynum has explored the twelfth-century concern with fashioning the self in the context of belonging to groups and fulfilling roles in “Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?” in Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 87-90.
A monk should recognize himself and his purpose in these words. By turning his attention and his desires away from the world, he will see God.

In Aelred’s presentation, the process of forgetting and (re-)learning begins with the desire to see. Eventually, this sight will transcend all ideas of corporeal vision, but this moment stands at the end of a long process set in motion by desire and pursued through intentionally-structured desire. This structuring or conversion of desire is a hermeneutic process, in which one climbs from illusory object to illusory object with each repetition promising to draw the seeker closer to the object of his search, much like Hugh of St. Victor’s approach to the corporeal imagery seen by disembodied human souls.

The process described by Aelred and Bernard is identical to that dramatized in the *Vision of Ailsi* and the story of Roger and Alexander. The human reaches out and the divinity takes him away. This *raptus*, however, is never complete. Instead, the believer is brought part-way and left restless, anxious, and always unsatisfied in his progress towards the object of his desire. The challenge is to maintain focus in the face of frustrated desire, and the doubts that inevitably assail the one who can currently only possess what he loves “in part” but not in whole. The problem remains with the human experience in the “region of unlikeness” where the ultimate truth of God can only be known indirectly through mediating images. The experience of this arena of imperfect knowledge and ways of knowing is the battleground where the believer cultivates an immaterial method of escape and transcendence. This avenue of escape is conditioned, on its human end, in no small part through affective experience, particularly desire.

**Conclusion**

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88 Aelred, Sermo, 74.55, 260. “Denique de domo patris sui exit oblitus, ad anteriors se extendit et eligi abiecutus esse in domo Dei magis quam habitare in tabernaculis peccatorum.”
In the discussion above, I have traced some of the ways that the desire to see the spiritual world intertwines with other desires in the stories drawn from the *Book of Revelations*. This desire appears as a connective force, recurrently bridging the space between apparently diametric oppositions such as that between the self and the other, the reader and the text, and the human and the divine. The pulling and connecting desire performs are both potentially salvific and dangerous. Indeed, the orienting or the re-orienting of desire presents itself as a central theme. The ultimate object, or fixation, of the human mind should be God itself, but the attainment of this object is constantly deferred, and approached through a series of mediators all of which participate, to some extent, in this ultimate divine object.

In the case of the desire to see something spiritual, the danger lies in the potential for a “fascination with noumenal beings made phenomenal” to supplant reverence for the noumena itself.89 I have suggested that there could be something sorcerous about such a personal fixation, but magical conjuration is only one of the symptoms of a larger concern regarding personal engagement with creation rather than the creator. Peter’s exegesis of Philippians 3:13, indicates this very approach to personal experience and the desire to experience. The *Book of Revelations* is both a celebration of phenomena apprehended in sensory terms and their potential to move and inspire as well as a call to orient this experience and the desire for it correctly.

The engagement with the things of this world as ends in and of themselves stands as the recurrent anxiety that is explored and partially defused in both Peter’s visions and in the larger clerical culture around him that created and consumed these narratives. As I outlined in the first chapter, Peter of Cornwall found himself responsible for the administration of considerable earthly properties, particularly within the busy city of London. Due to his position, he also

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became involved in government and other secular affairs. His peers, likewise, found themselves in similar positions; indeed, for secular clerics, like Peter of Cornwall’s friend Peter of Blois, the situation could be far more extreme. The market for learned men overwhelmingly led to a life in the growing bureaucracies which increasingly were called upon to administer, record, and fix their attentions upon the world and its contents.

John D. Cotts in his study of Peter of Blois, termed this anxiety “the clerical dilemma.” Men like Peter of Blois had to balance professional, educational, and spiritual concerns in “an uneasy synthesis.” Learned men, caught between *regnum* and *sacerdotium*, found themselves in a difficult position, given all the skills for the pursuit of God, but paid to employ them for the good of Caesar. Cotts ties the ambiguous position of these clerics to their literary output in the late twelfth century. Men like Peter of Blois or Walter Map created works alive with satirical reflection upon the life of the cleric and the courtier, often clearly aware of the transient and illusory nature of the objects that absorbed their attention while engaged in secular employment or administration. Indeed, Leclercq, who identified early on the type of twelfth-century affective piety that I have argued suffuses Peter of Cornwall’s *Book of Revelations*, argued that Peter of Blois was not an a prominent example of this kind of religiosity, based upon his involvement in the world. Peter of Blois’ literary production, however, is acutely aware of the spiritual difficulties entailed by his immersion in the secular. In particular, he explores the dangers of trusting the material world that one can see and neglecting the invisible spiritual

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90 For the connection between Peter of Cornwall and Peter of Blois, see the discussion in the first chapter. Peter of Cornwall appears as the recipient of one of Peter of Blois’ letters.
93 The likening of the court to Hell, and in particular a series of illusory, unattainable goods, features in the prologue to Walter Map’s *De nugis curialium*, 2-10.
world on a number of occasions, often employing wording very much like that Peter of Cornwall used in the preface to the *Book of Revelations*.95

The concerns of men like Peter of Blois were not very far from those that occupied men like Peter of Cornwall or his associates in the Cistercian monastery of Stratford Langthorne. Peter of Cornwall himself may have once been in the very position Peter of Blois occupied for his entire life. Peter of Cornwall was already over thirty when he became a canon, and although it is impossible to move beyond conjecture on this point, one wonders if he at one time considered the number of paths open to him as a learned young man and had to choose to reach out to “those things which are ahead,” rather than the enticements of secular employment.96 Many of his Cistercian friends would have faced a similar moment in their own lives, entering their order when already adult men. For these men, the reordering of their desires and the forgetting of the past and its values formed no small goal, as Aelred of Rievaulx emphasizes in his exegesis of Philippians 3:13. That this same verse illustrates how one should “read” visions and revelations for Peter of Cornwall is no accident. The two are joined together as part of the same affective religious experience.

This concern with the misuse of human and especially clerical gifts once again brings the discussion into contact with twelfth-century portrayals of magic and the supernatural. The same types of clerical literatures suffused with the conflict between *regnum* and *sacerdotium* that engaged writers like Peter of Blois or Walter Map, also played host to an explosion of references to magic and clerical conjuration. David Rollo has found in these magical episodes a deliberate reflection upon the process of literary composition and hermeneutics shared by the educated

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95 See the discussion of one of Peter’s letters in chapter three. These same themes feature in his poetry, see P. Dronke, “Peter of Blois and Poetry at the Court of Henry II,” *Mediaeval Studies* 38 (1976), 206-8.
96 For the date of Peter’s conversion, see the discussion in chapter one as well as Sharpe and Easting, *Peter of Cornwall’s Book of Revelations*, 4-5.
Monika Otter has also detected a narrative self-awareness in twelfth-century accounts of voyages to the Other World written by twelfth-century historians. This awareness plays with the inevitable imperfections and inaccuracies in the literary mimesis of written history, suggesting that the historian can only conjure illusions like the immaterial images of dreams or visions.\(^9^7\)

In the actual practice of medieval magic, Richard Kieckhefer has identified similar themes regarding the use and misuse of clerical abilities. Even clerics in minor orders held the potential power to command spirits. Some individuals apparently went beyond the practice of exorcism and employed their ability to command for other ends. In Kieckhefer’s opinion these men formed a “clerical underworld” defined by the practice of necromancy, or the conjuration and command of demons.\(^9^8\) In the stories regarding necromancers and the surviving magical handbooks produced by practicing necromancers, one curious factor is the often astonishingly petty goals these men sought to achieve. Things like finding lost trinkets and the seduction of women fill surviving handbooks, while literary depictions of necromancers, like those of Caesarius of Heisterbach, often use them as tools to simply conjure the spiritual into a visible form to move the story along.\(^1^0^0\) Viewed through the approach to manifestations of the spiritual world found in the *Book of Revelations*, Kieckhefer’s clerical underworld becomes a study in hermeneutic failure. The necromancer as misguided cleric turns his attention towards the created world and his pleasures within it and in so doing turns his regular conviviality with the spiritual into nothing more than an extension of his normal corporeal life.

\(^9^7\) Rollo, *Glamorous Sorcery*, xii-xiii.
\(^9^8\) Otter, *Inventiones*, 93-128.
\(^1^0^0\) One example of such a surviving handbook, admittedly from a period long after the twelfth century, has been published by Richard Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer’s Manual of the Fifteenth Century* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998).
All of these approaches to magic, the supernatural, and the sight of the normally invisible constitute reflections on hermeneutic processes, and it is precisely the human experience of these processes that the *Book of Revelations* illustrates so well. In particular, the stories explored above illuminate the emotional experience of belief as captured by one cleric at the turn of the thirteenth century. Peter’s assemblage of texts and his informants are highly localized and idiosyncratic, but through this very character they can reveal a very specific emotional community and its engagement with wider currents in the society of the time and the accumulated literary heritage of the Latin-language visionary genre. The *Book of Revelations* can also help us to approach the striking and recurrent desire to see or experience something spiritual expressed in texts from the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, and how this desire participated in other human loves, doubts, and hopes.

The picture that appears of human desires, emotions and relationships in the *Book of Revelations* does not consist of a simple set of substitutions and sublimations; instead, Peter’s revelations depict the positive participation of these affective bonds in an individual’s spiritual life. In these stories, friends and family are not solely attachments to be denied and overcome. Indeed, these relationships form an essential type of mediation between the individual and God. Likewise, the desire to see the spiritual world, born to some extent from a fascination with the hidden and mysterious, can actively participate in the journey towards the divinity. In the bonds and desires between people and the desire to see something spiritual, the goal is not to deny the experience itself but recognize the participation of the experience in a larger process of reconciliation and reunification, in other words, to be mindful of one’s desires and experiences as a text with many levels of meaning that all point to a single object that escapes the text itself. The importance and persistence of human affect, runs parallel to the stubborn perseverance of
corporeal imagery in visionary experience explored in the last chapter. In both cases, the ultimate object of desire escapes the tools of description, but these tools persist, even when transcended, as the individual carries them, and is carried by them, through the process of transformation.
Main Conclusion

In the preceding pages, I have traced different levels of meaning found in the Book of Revelations of Peter of Cornwall. This diversity of meanings and potential interpretive modes illuminates the oft-cited words in the prologue of the manuscript dealing with medieval doubt and religious belief. The seeing-is-believing skepticism Peter proposes in the prologue proves to be immensely productive and essential to the ways in which humanity can access the divine. The division between the sensible and the insensible provides opportunities as well as problems. Peter arranges materials through which readers can use this binary not as a solvent of faith but as its inspiration. The religious experience glimpsed in the collection’s contents and arrangement builds upon the division between what human beings can know through the senses and what they cannot. This division creates the opportunity for both doubt and for faith, and the experience of both of these states defines the human approach to God. This approach occurs in the Augustinian “region of unlikeness,” a space defined by both the promise and threat of hermeneutic processes.

My exploration of the text began with the personality of its author or compiler and the context of its composition. In the consideration of Peter’s works, a common thread emerged. This common thread lies in the discernment of allegorical and spiritual meanings from the appearances of things. In his engagements with Jews, the words of the bible, or the prognosticum read at the consecration of a bishop, Peter is primarily concerned with the process of Christian hermeneutics. In the larger literary world in which he worked, Peter’s concern with interpretive processes was following major trends in philosophy, theology, and historiography.

The Book of Revelations fits neatly into Peter’s body of works, concerned as it is with the discernment of spiritual realities which are often invisible in the course of everyday life. The
second chapter explored the issue of human access to these realities in two primary modes. The first of these is Peter’s essential problematic, namely the limitations of human epistemology resulting from the Fall. Doubt is a result of humanity’s estrangement from the spiritual world and the inability to directly experience this world through the senses of the body. Revelations respond to this human disability, but they form part of a larger process that is also situated within humanity’s estrangement from the divinity and those things that are like it. The process of faith represents the true path towards the reparation of the damage done to human knowledge in the Fall, and Peter’s revelations can play some role in the development and refinement of this faith.

The second mode questions the ways in which access to this spiritual world is granted in Peter’s revelations, and the processes of discernment these methods of access demanded. Mundane explanations for apparent visionary phenomena had to be separated from divine or demonic possibilities, placing considerable weight on the shoulders of the “readers” of revelations to discern between these possibilities.

Building upon the states in which signs of the spiritual world appear in familiar terms to living men and women, the third chapter interrogated what it is that Peter’s revelations actually reveal. In visions of rewards and punishments and the visitations of the dead to the living, human beings gain a great deal of information regarding the spiritual world and the divinity. This information is conveyed via mediating signs. The Other World is never seen as it really is because living eyes cannot see it; instead, mortal men approach the spiritual world through imagery drawn from the familiar world of matter. The signs through which spiritual things appear both reveal and mislead and a dialectic between submission to the sign and suspicion of the sign arises in which a limited, mortal being can approach the limitless.
The last chapter built upon this interior dialectic, returning to the issue of faith and the unseen, internal, affective states of individuals. The consideration of the role of human desire and affect in visionary hermeneutics forms a valuable addition to a number of conversations regarding medieval visionary experience. The tension between the literal and the figurative, identified by Carozzi, is immensely productive and essential to the interplay between the visible and the invisible found in the *Book of Revelations*. Such a dialectic is an essential part of the human approach to realities that escape the regular powers of human sense perception. The affective alignment of the individual, however, is what allows this dialectic to yield valid knowledge. This proper alignment was, in a number of respects, the most difficult variable, and its absence would invalidate the ability of visionary experience as a sign to convey knowledge.

The role of human affect in the hermeneutic potential of visionary imagery directly connects revelatory literature to other contemporary clerical discourses concerned with human relationships and engagement with the world. For Peter and a number of his contemporaries, Philippians 3:13 describes this proper human affective alignment. This interior orientation of the reader parallels the role of faith, hope and love in Augustinian exegesis. Only when the human turns towards the divinity beyond the sign, or hidden in the sign, can holy texts be accurately read. In charting the large shifts in revelatory and visionary literatures identified by Dinzelbacher and Carozzi, scholars cannot afford to neglect the history of the devotional and emotional states which allowed these visions and revelations to “speak” and to draw the human towards the divine.

In particular, scholars could benefit from a greater awareness of how these devotional and emotional states respond to and make use of the hermeneutic gap between worlds. The negotiation of this gap required a constant process of discernment between seen and unseen,
mundane and miraculous, doubt and belief. The centrality of discernment to the male, clerical spirituality reflected in the Book of Revelations provides an important antecedent to studies which have mainly focused on later sources pertaining to female spirituality. As Nancy Caciola has noted, when one looks closely, suspicion regarding revelations is not a new development of the later Middle Ages.¹

This study provides examples of the kinds of suspicions entertained in the homo-social setting of twelfth-century monasticism, and illustrates how these uncertainties are central to its religiosity. The picture that emerges of these doubts is less troubled and far more positive than that often attributed to later female spirituality; however, all of the essential elements are in fact already present. The apparent confidence in the ability to ultimately interpret and verify the materials generated by peers may constitute a pivotal difference. That the revelatory genres authored by men changed so drastically in the thirteenth century may suggest that this confidence waned. In that case, attention may have shifted away from perceived equals to other sources of revelation, which could be more easily scrutinized, such as the laity and especially women.²

Peter composed the Book of Revelations on the cusp of a number of major changes in the revelatory and visionary literatures upon which he drew. In only a couple decades after the composition of the text, visions like St. Patrick’s Purgatory or Peter’s own Vision of Ailsi became a thing of the past. This study has attempted to illustrate some of the major features of these genres, particularly the interactions between faith and doubt, as Peter captured them around the year 1200. When scholars place Peter’s collection in the context of the changes in revelatory literatures or approaches to the supernatural in the twelfth or thirteenth centuries, they should

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¹ Caciola, Discerning Spirits, xi-xii. Caciola found that female spirituality had always been subject to some level of suspicion. Peter’s compilation demonstrates that many of these uncertainties had corollaries in male spirituality.

² Such a trajectory would complement many of the developments suggested by Elliot, Proving Woman, 297-300. I offer this possibility here as an undemonstrated hypothesis.
focus upon the stability of the basic hermeneutic modes repeatedly suggested by the contents of Peter’s collection. In addition, my study of the *Book of Revelations* has repeatedly emphasized the importance of a direct engagement with the mystery of faith in any scholarly study of visionary literature. In fact, taking the process of belief seriously is a prerequisite for understanding the central tropes, assumptions, and goals of this genre.

The ways of approaching spiritual things explored in the *Book of Revelations* make an interesting comparison to an historian’s attempt to access the past. In both cases the objects of desire can only be approached indirectly: for the *Book of Revelations*, the world outside of matter, or for the historian, the past. As Nicholas Watson suggests, both undertakings are structured around the presence of a “hermeneutic gap” which can never be completely overcome. In fact, the successful pursuit of both types of inquiry requires an awareness of both the gap and its persistence.³ Due to this aporia, contact for the historian or visionary with the objects of their desire occurs through likenesses, related to but distinct from the things they represent. Direct knowledge of the past itself escapes the historian’s sensory abilities, just as direct knowledge of the spirit surpasses the medieval visionary. In place of a meeting with the desired past, the historian looks for emanations cascading from it that can be accessed. From these emanations, or partial reflections, one can construct stories of a world distinct from our own, but a world from which the present world is somehow descended. To the historian, this discursive world both is and is not the past. The readers of visions and revelations often spoke as if all the objects, places, and people described in the spiritual world were materially present in one moment, and then stressed that all these objects, places, and people where really immaterial signs signifying realities that cannot be directly known in the next. In much the same way, we tell stories of the

past that convey knowledge of it, while at the same time, in various ways, insisting that these histories are unreal and only approximations.

The middle state, be it the realm of unlikeness, or images devoid of matter, in which the medieval visionary sought some knowledge of the divine, parallels the imaginative space in which the historian looks for the past. In this fashion, the authors of the contents of the *Book of Revelations* and the modern reader can meet one another. The desire for something spiritual and the desire for the past can lead to two closely intertwined hermeneutic processes and it is in the light of this evocative promise that this study will end.4

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4 Watson terms this convergence “affective historicity,” “Desire for the Past,” 93.
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## Appendix 1: List of Works in *Liber revelationum*, Book I
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\(^1\) Note chapters 188-199 are not present.
# Appendix 2: Oral Stories “Section” (Chapters 183-206)

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