

BEYOND THE BODY AND BACK AGAIN: VISIONS OF OTHERWORLDLY JOURNEYS IN CAROLINGIAN THEOLOGY

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This essay analyzes the mechanics of temporary journeys to the afterlife in Latin texts from the ninth century, the period typically associated with the birth of a medieval visionary genre. Sometimes framed as near-death experiences, sometimes as simple dreams, journeys to an otherworldly landscape were primarily intended as admonitions to the living, but in crossing the boundary between living and dead, the visionary's own soul and body experienced a problematic disjuncture. In contrast to previous scholarship, which has analyzed early medieval visions primarily as political texts, as contributions to a Christian belief in purgatory, or as forerunners to later medieval classics like Dante's Divine Comedy, this study uses visions as windows onto the theology of the soul-body union. The first part surveys important discussions that preceded and informed Carolingian visions of the afterlife (including Augustine's dialogues on the soul, the famous Merovingian Vision of Barontus, and various Insular texts with otherworldly encounters). The second part shows how, against these earlier models, Carolingian visionary authors broke with conventions in order to safeguard the stability of the soul's containment within its earthly body — the very same doctrinal issue that appears with mounting urgency in treatises on the soul produced in the middle decades of the ninth century. A key intervention of the essay is to argue for greater attention to the connections between Carolingian visionary texts and theological tracts, a point often overlooked in a field that has emphasized the imaginative narratives of visionary literature as fundamentally distinct from the ostensible conservatism of early medieval theology.

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The following abbreviations are used in this article: Heito, *VW* = Heito, *Visio Wettini*, ed. E. Dümmler, MGH, *Poetae Latini mediæ aevi* 2 (Berlin, 1884), 267–75; and Walafrid, *VW* = Walafrid Strabo, *Visio Wettini*, ed. and trans. David A. Traill, *Walahfrid Strabo's Visio Wettini: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Bern, 1974). All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

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As dawn was breaking on 3 November 824, a monk named Wetti “woke up” after what had definitively been the worst night of his life.¹ Three days previously, according to the monks’ common practice, Wetti had taken a draught for his health (*potio ad providendam salutem corporis*), but in this case it generated a sudden and violent reaction.² While the draught was likely intended to act as a purgative, its effects were to completely disrupt Wetti’s system: he vomited up undigested food, suffered severe pains in his belly, and could not consume sufficient nourishment. But Tuesday night brought the most disturbing after-effect: as Wetti lay weak in his bed, a horde of demons appeared to torment him. Fortunately, God’s angels came to his assistance, and one such angel took Wetti on a spiritually edifying journey. He was able to witness the abode of the saints and the purgatorial punishments of sinners, each enduring a form of suffering tailored to his or her particular crimes. After a long sermon from the angel about the need for Wetti and his contemporaries to correct their way of life, the monk awoke, immediately instructed his abbot about all that he had seen and heard, and began singing psalms and entreating prayers for the forgiveness of his sins. He died the next day.

The *Vision of Wetti*, produced in two different versions (prose and verse) at the monastery of Reichenau, was the first in a long series of visionary texts that appeared across the Carolingian realm starting in the 820s.³ As Paul Dutton

¹ Heito, *VW* 28, ed. Dümmler, 274; and Walafrid, *VW*, line 829. On the *Visio Wettini*, see Paul Edward Dutton, *The Politics of Dreaming in the Carolingian Empire* (Lincoln, 1994), 63–80; Richard Pollard, “Charlemagne’s Posthumous Reputation and the *Visio Wettini*, 825–1851,” in *Charlemagne: Les temps, les espaces, les hommes. Construction et déconstruction d’un règne*, ed. Rolf Grosse and Michel Sot (Turnhout, 2018), 529–49; Jesse Keskiäho, *Dreams and Visions in the Early Middle Ages: The Reception and Use of Patristic Ideas, 400–900* (Cambridge, 2015), 66–70; Mayke de Jong, *The Penitential State: Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814–840* (Cambridge, 2009), 136–41; Claude Carozzi, *Le voyage de l’âme dans l’au-delà d’après la littérature latine (Ve–XIIIe siècle)* (Rome, 1994), 324–41; and Franz Neiske, “Vision und Totengedenken,” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 20 (1986): 137–85, at 152–54.

² Heito, *VW* 1, ed. Dümmler, 268; and Walafrid, *VW*, lines 189–94. On the importance of regular bodily purgation in monastic routines, see the Plan of Saint-Gall (with its room labeled *fletomatis hic gustandum vel potionariis*): Walter Horn and Ernest Born, *The Plan of St. Gall: A Study of the Architecture and Economy of, and Life in a Paradigmatic Carolingian Monastery*, 3 vols. (Berkeley, 1979), 2:175–88 and 3:52–59. See also the monthly regimens edited by Frank-Dieter Groenke, “Die frühmittelalterlichen lateinischen Monatskalendarien: Text — Übersetzung — Kommentar,” (Ph.D. diss., Freie Universität Berlin, 1986); and Rainer Reiche, “Einige lateinische Monatsdiätetiken aus Wiener und St. Galler Handschriften,” *Sudhoffs Archiv* 57 (1973): 113–141.

³ For the prose version from 824 by Heito, former abbot of Reichenau, in addition to the edition by Dümmler, there is a new edition in preparation by Richard Pollard. See also the translation by Eileen Gardiner, *Visions of Heaven and Hell Before Dante* (New York, 1989), 65–79. For the verse version from 827 by Walafrid Strabo, a monk at Reichenau, in addition to the edition and translation by Traill, see E. Dümmler, *MGH, Poetae Latini mediæ aevi* 2

has so evocatively illuminated, these texts served not simply as forceful calls to spiritual repentance, echoing similar themes to the reforming mandates issued by Carolingian kings and ecclesiastical councils, but they were also experiments in a new style of veiled political criticism, directed in large part at the kings themselves.⁴ One of the more memorable moments in Wetti's journey was the sight of the deceased Charlemagne suffering from beasts tearing at his genitals as penalty for sexual immorality — an episode that Dutton has set within an intensifying wave of censure directed toward the royal family during the early reign of Louis the Pious.⁵ Criticism for a range of different faults would continue to pursue the Carolingian dynasty in visions written at various “dream factories” up through the 880s.⁶

As a distinct mode of writing about otherworldly journeys, the *Vision of Wetti* has likewise been seen to catalyze the emergence of a new genre, one that would unfurl toward Dante's fourteenth-century *Divine Comedy*.⁷ Historians such as Yitzhak Hen and Claude Carozzi have debated whether to locate the origins of

(Berlin, 1884), 301–33. On Walafrid's version as a critical response to Heito's text (particularly in terms of how Wetti's sins are described), see Albrecht Diem, “Teaching Sodomy in a Carolingian Monastery: A Study of Walafrid Strabo's and Heito's *Visio Wettini*,” *German History* 34 (2016): 385–401.

⁴ Dutton, *Politics of Dreaming*. On visions as political commentary, see also Wilhelm Levison, “Die Politik in den Jenseitsvisionen des frühen Mittelalters,” in *Festgabe Friedrich von Bezold* (Bonn, 1921), 81–100; repr. in *Ideologie und Herrschaft im Mittelalter*, ed. Max Kerner (Darmstadt, 1982), 80–100; Klaus Herbers, “Dreams, Visions, and Politics in Carolingian Europe,” in *Dreams, Nature, and Practices as Signs of the Future in the Middle Ages*, ed. Klaus Herbers and Hans-Christian Lehner (Leiden, 2022), 11–28; and David Ganz, “Charlemagne in Hell,” *Florilegium* 17 (2000): 175–94. Compare Pollard, “Charlemagne's Posthumous Reputation.”

⁵ Heito, *VW* 11, ed. Dümmler, 271. Pollard points out that this is a minor point in the larger vision, yet it has been the focal point for most recent analyses: Pollard, “Charlemagne's Posthumous Reputation,” esp. 531.

⁶ On “dream factories,” see Dutton, *Politics of Dreaming*, 75, 97, 192, 223, 247, and 254, who suggests Reichenau, Saint-Gall, Mainz, Reims, and Einhard's circle as key sites for the development of visionary literature.

⁷ Peter Dinzlacher, *Vision und Visionsliteratur im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 1981), still offers the most comprehensive survey of medieval visions (arguing for a subdivision between otherworldly journeys and mystical, ecstatic visions). Further overviews include Robert Easting, *Visions of the Other World in Middle English* (Cambridge, 1997); Carozzi, *Le voyage de l'âme dans l'au-delà*; Carol Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys: Accounts of Near-Death Experience in Medieval and Modern Times* (Oxford, 1987); and, most recently, *Imagining the Medieval Afterlife*, ed. Richard Pollard (Cambridge, 2020). On the early Middle Ages, see Isabel Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority in Merovingian Gaul* (Ithaca, 2000); and Keskiäho, *Dreams and Visions in the Early Middle Ages*. In particular relation to Dante, see Marcus Dods, *Forerunners of Dante: An Account of Some of the More Important Visions of the Unseen World, from the Earliest Times* (Edinburgh, 1903); Forrest S. Smith, *Secular and Sacred Visionaries in the Late Middle Ages* (New York, 1986); Alison Morgan, *Dante and the Medieval Other World* (Cambridge, 1990); and Aron Gurevich, “The Divine

a medieval visionary genre in the seventh or the ninth centuries: the seventh century witnessed the first attempts to write extended Latin narratives about the soul leaving and returning to the body, but it was not until the 820s that visions began to circulate widely as independent texts rather than elements within hagiography, sermons, or historical accounts.⁸ Given the way in which these visions mapped the fate of individual souls in the afterlife, scholarship has concentrated on their role in the development of a doctrine of purgatory.⁹ While the theological space of purgatory may not have been established by conciliar decree until the thirteenth century, thinkers such as Bede had already elaborated upon Augustine's and Gregory the Great's theories about post-mortem purification, and Carolingian visionary texts probed further into the times and places of purgatorial punishment.¹⁰

However, it is not Wetti's contribution to modes of early medieval criticism, the crystallization of new genres, or sharpening conceptions of a purgatorial landscape that concern me here. As the authors of Wetti's vision participated in the above three developments, they were compelled to grapple with a fundamental

Comedy before Dante," in *Medieval Popular Culture*, trans. János Bak and Paul Hollingsworth (Cambridge, 1988), 104–52.

⁸ For the former argument, see Carozzi, *Le voyage de l'âme dans l'au-delà* (n. 1 above), 4–5; Maria Pia Ciccarese, "La *Visio Baronti* nella tradizione letteraria delle *Visiones dell'aldilà*," *Romanobarbarica* 6 (1981/82): 25–52, at 26–27; Jamie Kreiner, "Autopsies and Philosophies of a Merovingian Life: Death, Responsibility, Salvation," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 22 (2014): 113–52, at 114; and Morgan, *Dante and the Medieval Other World*, 2. For the latter, see Yitzhak Hen, "The Structure and Aims of the *Visio Baronti*," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 47 (1996): 477–97, at 485 (with qualification that the late seventh century was a "watershed" in Yitzhak Hen, "Visions of the Afterlife in the Early Medieval West," in *Imagining the Medieval Afterlife*, ed. Pollard, 25–39, at 26); Richard Pollard, "A Morbid Efflorescence: Envisaging the Afterlife in the Carolingian Period," in *Imagining the Medieval Afterlife*, ed. Pollard, 40–61, at 42; and Hans Joachim Kamphausen, *Traum und Vision in der lateinischen Poesie der Karolingerzeit* (Bern, 1975), 84. Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority*, 136–141, argues that seventh-century visionary accounts were part of a broader interest in the dreams of ordinary Christians in Merovingian Gaul, with sinners like Barontus (not only saints like Peter and Paul) now being able to undertake otherworldly journeys. Kesiahho, *Dreams and Visions in the Early Middle Ages* (n. 1 above), 59, sets visions of the afterlife within a developing genre that dates back to Gregory's *Dialogi*.

⁹ See, for example, Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. A. Goldhammer (Chicago, 1984), 107–122; Peter Brown, *The Ransom of the Soul: Afterlife and Wealth in Early Western Christianity* (Cambridge, MA, 2015), 65–74, 139–47, and 197–211; Isabel Moreira, *Heaven's Purge: Purgatory in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2010), 85–101, 113–34, and 148–59; Helen Foxhall Forbes, "The Theology of the Afterlife in the Early Middle Ages, c. 400–c. 1000," in *Imagining the Medieval Afterlife*, ed. Pollard, 153–75, at 157–60; Brian Patrick McGuire, "Purgatory, the Communion of Saints, and Medieval Change," *Viator* 20 (1989): 61–84; and Kreiner, "Autopsies and Philosophies," 113–52.

¹⁰ Le Goff, *Birth of Purgatory*, traces the emergence of the word and idea of *purgatorium* to the late twelfth century (with purgatory being established as official doctrine at the Second Council of Lyons in 1274). Compare Moreira, *Heaven's Purge*.

conundrum, one that lay at the heart of the entire penitential system within which the visionary encounter was implicated. This was the practicalities of the soul-body relationship, a relationship grounded in a notion of binaries.¹¹ Alongside, and in conjunction with, the dichotomy of corporeal and incorporeal, body and soul were often mapped onto the binary of this world and the other world. While the soul existed on earth and the body would be resurrected into heaven or hell, this world, being material, was the domain of the body, and the afterlife, being the spiritual realm, aligned with the nature of the soul. This division of the cosmos was an ancient one. It is evident in the arguments that late antique philosophers leveled against Christian doctrines of the bodily resurrection — namely, that the body was composed primarily of the heaviest of the four elements and could not possibly dwell in the almost immaterial fire of the heavens.¹² It is evident in Augustine of Hippo’s rebuttal of those claims, where he pointed out that if the immaterial soul was trapped within the heavier elements now, “will souls not at some point be able to raise earthly bodies up on high?”¹³

But it was not the doctrine of the resurrection that seems to have most troubled Christians of the Carolingian kingdom. Rather, it was a problem of liminality, a conception of the afterlife that was segmented and implied a problematic separation between soul and body. This intermediate afterlife (the “little future of the soul” in the words of Peter Brown or the “postmortal” according to Ellen Muehlberger) was the period of time after death and before the Last Judgment, at which point the resurrection of all bodies would occur.¹⁴ Not only was this an uncharted expanse of time, neither marked by the stages of life as witnessed on earth nor limitless like the eternal judgment would be, but it was also the only period of an individual’s entire existence when soul and body were separated.

¹¹ On theological questions about the soul-body union in the time of Gregory the Great, see Matthew Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints’ Cult in the Age of Gregory the Great* (Oxford, 2012). On this relationship in the Carolingian period and early medieval England, respectively, see Meg Leja, *Embodying the Soul: Medicine and Religion in Carolingian Europe* (Philadelphia, 2022); and Leslie Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions* (Toronto, 2011).

¹² See Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 22.11, ed. B. Dombart and A. Kalb, CCSL 48 (Turnhout, 1955), 829–31.

¹³ Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 22.11, ed. Dombart and Kalb, 830: “et cum ualeat nunc natura corporum terrenorum deprimere animas deorsum, aliquando et animae leuare sursum terrena corpora non ualebunt?” On late antique theories of the resurrected body, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (New York, 1995), 19–114.

¹⁴ See Brown, *Ransom of the Soul*, 9–12; and Ellen Muehlberger, *Moment of Reckoning: Imagined Death and Its Consequences in Late Ancient Christianity* (Philadelphia, 2019), 149–51 and 165–68. Muehlberger sees the development of a postmortal anthropology as a particular concern of fourth-century Christians. See also Moreira, *Heaven’s Purge*, 24–36; Nancy Caciola, *Afterlives: The Return of the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 2016), 38–65; and Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints’ Cult*, 21–148.

The visionary genre developed by Carolingian intellectuals engaged primarily with this intermediate afterlife for the very reason that it was unstable — it was a point at which God’s judgment had become manifest *and* could still be amended.¹⁵ The visionary’s sighting of souls undergoing punishment was not intended to be simply descriptive. It was meant to be electrifying: the protagonist’s difficult journey “beyond” the body and back again to report to the living would, it was hoped, engineer a release from the punishments that were currently holding the souls of the dead.¹⁶ The visionary thus served as a crucial link between the living and dead, but, in performing this task, he or she also undermined the strict separation between material and nonmaterial worlds.

Visionaries whose souls came and went freely between earthly and otherworldly realms, seemingly untethered to the flesh in a systematic way, compromised the coherence of the body-soul attachment. This was no mere personal conundrum, but could be seen to threaten the very bedrock of penitential reasoning, wherein the soul was forever marked by sins committed while in the body but could also be purged of those sins by bodily penance, whether performed before an individual’s death or by the intercession of those still living.¹⁷ The disconnect between the helplessness of dis-embodied souls in the afterlife and the helpfulness of embodied souls on earth is a particularly prominent message in ninth-century visions, which, as Richard Pollard has demonstrated, placed newfound emphasis on the utility of intercession, especially intercessory prayer for the dead.¹⁸ The visionary served an important purpose in revealing the need for (and efficacy of) intercession yet did little to uphold the stability of individual identity, a matter of pressing concern to the pastoral agenda of the Carolingian reforms.

This article takes stock of ten different accounts of journeys to the otherworld that were composed within the Carolingian realm over the ninth

¹⁵ Isabel Moreira, “Purgatory’s Intercessors: Bishops, Ghosts, and Angry Wives,” in *Imagining the Medieval Afterlife*, ed. Pollard (n. 7 above), 133–52, at 136–37, draws attention to the flexible understanding of what “amending” the fate of the dead might look like in this period.

¹⁶ See, in particular, the *Visio Bernoldi* (discussed below), where the suffering of the dead is ameliorated *within the course of the vision* through the activity of the visionary and the requests he makes to the living.

¹⁷ For an overview of penance, see Rob Meens, *Penance in Medieval Europe, 600–1200* (Cambridge, 2014); and Sarah Hamilton, *The Practice of Penance, 900–1050* (Woodbridge, 2001). On intercession, see Renie S. Choy, *Intercessory Prayer and the Monastic Ideal in the Time of the Carolingian Reforms* (Oxford, 2016); Megan McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints: Prayer for the Dead in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca, 1994), 178–249; Gavin Fort, “Penitents and Their Proxies: Penance for Others in Early Medieval Europe,” *Church History* 86 (2017): 1–32; Moreira, “Purgatory’s Intercessors”; and Neiske, “Vision und Totengedenken” (n. 1 above), 137–61.

¹⁸ Pollard, “A Morbid Efflorescence” (n. 8 above).

century.¹⁹ Its particular focus on the dynamics of the visionary experience reveals that authors took great care with how they crafted these “truthful reports.”²⁰ Ninth-century visions diverged at crucial points with models set by late antique and more recent Merovingian and Insular writers; at the same time, they converged in heretofore unacknowledged ways with theology developed in contemporaneous treatises about the soul. These details suggest that, while Carolingian authors were excited by the possibilities of this nascent genre, they were also aware of its vulnerabilities. Above all, they were committed to a form of storytelling that buttressed the unity of soul and body and the finality of death, even if this came at the expense of a more dramatic and vivid narrative.²¹

STIFLING THE IMAGINATION

Around the year 800, Alcuin composed the treatise *On the Nature of the Soul* in response to a query from Charlemagne’s cousin Gundrada.²² The first Latin exposition on the constitution and function of the soul to be written in several hundred years, Alcuin’s work proved immensely popular with his contemporaries and has been viewed as setting a clear direction for Carolingian theological thought over the ninth century.²³ Defining the soul as “a discerning and rational spirit always in motion, always living. . . created to rule the movements of the body, invisible, incorporeal, without weight, without color, circumscribed yet

¹⁹ This is comprehensive, not exhaustive, and it includes only visions in which an individual “travels” to the afterlife (in contrast to being visited by one of the dead or experiencing a vision of a non-afterlife realm/figure/event).

²⁰ On rhetorical strategies to convey the truth of these visions, see Dutton, *Politics of Dreaming* (n. 1 above), esp. 73, 77, 174, and 256; Kesiaho, *Dreams and Visions in the Early Middle Ages* (n. 1 above), esp. 59–75; and Dinzlacher, *Vision und Visionsliteratur* (n. 7 above), 65–71. On the community’s role in validating a vision, see Michelle L. Roper, “Uniting the Community of the Living with the Dead: The Use of Other-World Visions in the Early Middle Ages,” in *Authority and Community in the Middle Ages*, ed. Donald Mowbray, Rhiannon Purdie, and Ian Wei (Stroud, 1999), 19–41, at 19–24.

²¹ Many studies frame the medieval visionary tradition as centered on imaginative description intended to provoke an emotional response. See, for example, Easting, *Visions of the Other World* (n. 7 above), 11: “However instructive Visions of the Other World as a genre are intended to be, they are of necessity primarily and emphatically works of the imagination rather than of rational argument.” See also Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys* (n. 7 above), 48–52; and Peter Dinzlacher, “Il corpo nelle visioni dell’aldilà,” *Micrologus* 1 (1993): 301–26, at 302.

²² On the dating and recipient of the treatise, see Donald A. Bullough, *Alcuin: Achievement and Reputation* (Leiden, 2004), 76–77 and 246.

²³ It survives in over thirty manuscripts from the ninth and tenth centuries: Paul E. Szarmach, “A Preface, Mainly Textual, to Alcuin’s *De ratione animae*,” in *The Man of Many Devices, Who Wandered Full Many Ways: Festschrift in Honor of János M. Bak*, ed. Balázs Nagy and Marcell Sebők (Budapest, 1999), 397–408.

whole in every member of its body,” *On the Nature of the Soul* adhered carefully to the beliefs of Augustine of Hippo who promoted a Neoplatonic argument for a strictly incorporeal soul.²⁴ Given Alcuin’s unparalleled intellectual status, the assumption has been that his treatise settled the contours of the soul as securely Augustinian at the moment when medieval theology began to take shape.²⁵

However, Alcuin’s treatise failed to address certain fundamental questions about the soul’s life within the body, just as Augustine’s writings had failed to alleviate the concerns of his contemporaries several centuries earlier.²⁶ In a dialogue from the 380s, *On the Magnitude of the Soul*, Augustine and his interlocutor, a friend (and future bishop) named Evodius of Uzalis, engage in a friendly debate over a thorny theological question — the nature of the soul’s substance. Evodius had proposed a more material type of soul, one that was physically diffused throughout the body, like the blood, and grew in size along with the body. Against this, Augustine sought to prove that the soul was not contained within the body because it did not possess the qualities of size or strength; as an incorporeal being, it was neither localized to a specific place nor affected by changes to its bodily home.²⁷ Even though, at one point in the dialogue, Evodius declares that if the soul is not located in the body “I do not know where I am,” like a good Socratic interlocutor, he ends the dialogue in total agreement with Augustine’s theses.²⁸

²⁴ Alcuin, *De ratione animae* 6, ed. James Curry, in “Alcuin, *De ratione animae*: A Text with Introduction, Critical Apparatus, and Translation,” (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1966), 54: “anima est spiritus intellectualis rationalis semper in motu semper vivens bonae malaeque voluntatis capax . . . ad regendum carnis motus creatus invisibilis incorporalis sine pondere sine colore circumscriptus in singulis suae carnis membris totus.” On Augustine’s incorporeal soul, see Roland Teske, “Augustine’s Theory of Soul,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge, 2001), 116–23.

²⁵ See Paul E. Szarmach, “Alfred, Alcuin, and the Soul,” in *Manuscript, Narrative, Lexicon: Essays on Literary and Cultural Transmission in Honor of Whitney F. Bolton*, ed. Robert Boenig and Kathleen Davis (Lewisburg, PA, 2000), 127–48, at 133–35; and John Mar-enbon, *Early Medieval Philosophy (480–1150): An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (London, 1988), 47–52. Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies* (n. 11 above), challenges the centrality of Alcuin’s Augustinian outlook in the centuries before 1000, arguing for a more materialist, cardio-centric view of the soul in early medieval England and revealing that there was a significant group of Carolingian thinkers inclined toward this “Stoicizing” position (though Alcuin’s view would eventually prevail).

²⁶ A comprehensive analysis of responses to Augustine’s theory of the soul throughout the early Middle Ages is offered by Gérard Mathon, “L’anthropologie chrétienne en Occident de Saint Augustin à Jean Scot Érigène,” 3 vols. (Ph.D. diss., Université de Lille, 1964).

²⁷ Augustine, *De quantitate animae* 23–32, ed. W. Hörmann, CSEL 89 (Vienna, 1986), 181–217. On the assumption that incorporeality equates with the inability to be localized, see Marta Cristiani, “L’espace de l’âme: La controverse sur la corporéité des esprits, le *De statu animae* de Claudien Mamert et le *Periphyseon*,” in *Eriugena: Studien zu seinen Quellen*, ed. Werner Beierwaltes (Heidelberg, 1980), 149–63.

²⁸ Augustine, *De quantitate animae* 30.61, ed. Hörmann, 207: “Nonne istis rationibus confici potest animas nostras non esse in corporibus? Quod si ita est, nonne ubi sim nescio?”

We witness, however, in a letter from Evodius to Augustine from 414 that the bishop of Uzalis continued to have doubts, triggered in particular by the recent death of one of his young notaries.²⁹ In contemplating this boy's passing out of the flesh, he revealed a deep anxiety about how the soul could even exist without a body. "When we exit from the body and escape every burden and the pervasiveness of sin, who are we?"³⁰ On the one hand, Evodius was convinced that the soul experienced an unburdening after the death of the body and was able to perform its intellectual functions more easily without such encumbrances. On the other hand, Evodius worried about how an incorporeal soul could retain its form and identity once it separated from the body; he surmised that, without material boundaries, every soul would, in effect, become one single substance drawn together from all incorporeal souls.³¹ The lack of a bodily vessel meant that there could be no differentiation and thus, most importantly, no reward or punishment for a holy life. Evodius wanted Augustine to confirm that, in fact, the soul was never unaccompanied and either received a new body upon the dissolution of its bonds with flesh or else exited the dead flesh in "some kind of body," which Evodius proposed might be formed of an insubstantial element like air or ether. Furthermore, he added, it seemed probable that this body possessed at least some of the five senses, so that the soul could function in a material universe.³²

Evodius's timeline, then, proposed three lives for the soul: the first, with a body composed of the four elements; the second, with a body made of ether or a similar insubstantial material; and the third, for eternity, with the resurrected body. Yet, if he hoped for confirmation of this timeline from the great Augustine, Evodius did not receive it. When it came to the soul's existence after death, Augustine became uncharacteristically terse, as Peter Brown has argued. In general, his large corpus worked to stifle postmortem imaginings as much as possible, reflecting, as it did, Augustine's own belief that certainty about what happened after death might create complacency during a Christian's life on earth.³³

Vision texts are not typically classed as a form of theological writing, but their authors were forced to confront the soul's "bodily-ness" in a way that other writers were not.³⁴ Just as God was described as speaking, thinking, and

²⁹ On Augustine's correspondence with Evodius on the soul, see Brown, *Ransom of the Soul* (n. 9 above), 59–76; and Muehlberger, *Moment of Reckoning* (n. 14 above), 151–55.

³⁰ Evodius, *Ep.* 158.4, ed. A. Goldbacher, in *S. Aureli Augustini Hipponiensis episcopi epistulae, pars III*, CSEL 44 (Vienna, 1904), 491: "exeuntes de corpore et onus omne et agile peccatum euadentes qui sumus?"

³¹ Evodius, *Ep.* 158.5–6, ed. Goldbacher, 491–92.

³² Evodius, *Ep.* 158.5–6, 8, and 11, ed. Goldbacher, 491–94 and 496.

³³ Brown, *Ransom of the Soul* (n. 9 above), 63–116 (who contextualizes Augustine's thought within the Pelagian controversy).

³⁴ See, however, Muehlberger, *Moment of Reckoning* (n. 14 above), esp. 156–65 and 178–81, who treats narratives such as the visions as a form of late antique experimental

moving in various narratives within the Bible, so did the soul have to be physicalized in order to craft an effective visionary experience. The crucial difference was that theologians could explain such descriptions of God as figures of speech, meant to aid humans in comprehending the utterly *incomprehensible* nature of the divine. The soul, on the other hand, was the very self, the core of human nature. If the soul could not be described and comprehended, that raised serious doubts about the purpose of theological study. In the case of formal treatises, authors faced an easier task because of the generalized nature of their subject; they could employ abstract and philosophical terminology to describe incorporeal souls in the plural. In the case of visions, the abstract was less of an option, since the agenda was often to depict familiar individuals and their status after death.

An incorporeal soul did not offer much potential when it came to the creative formation of a new visionary mode of writing.³⁵ For this reason, perhaps, Evodius's notion of an airy bodily form continued to find resonance among Latin writers in western Europe. Nevertheless, most Carolingian visionary authors seem to have been acutely aware of the doctrinal danger of suggesting that the soul might exit the body in a material form. Rather than depicting a view of the soul that catered to popular beliefs and stood in contrast to mainstream theology, ninth-century visionary authors hewed closely to arguments within contemporaneous treatises on the soul.³⁶ The correspondences between these two genres becomes sharper when one observes that the treatises written in the fifty years following Alcuin's *On the Nature of the Soul* did not, in fact, maintain a strictly Augustinian outlook, but rather, like the visionary authors, aimed to work in the niche between Augustine and Evodius.

INSPIRATION FOR THE JOURNEY

Two and a half centuries after Evodius's and Augustine's correspondence, a writer in western Gaul picked up many of Evodius's suggestions when he

theorizing. This study significantly recasts the importance of such texts, arguing that they are more representative of ancient Christian thought about death and the soul than most doctrinal writings, and it begins to dismantle the strict distinctions between Christian philosophy/theology and Christian storytelling.

³⁵ Dinzlacher, "Il corpo nelle visioni" (n. 21 above), 307, argues that visionary authors treated the soul "as if" it was corporeal (that is, palpable and recognizable in the afterlife), despite knowing that, theologically, the soul was immaterial.

³⁶ Many studies discuss the visions as repositories of popular belief or folklore, thus implicitly contrasting them with the high intellectualism of theological writings: Peter Dinzlacher, "The Way to the Other World in Medieval Literature and Art," *Folklore* 97 (1986): 70–87, at 70; and Jacques Le Goff, "The Learned and Popular Dimensions of Journeys in the Otherworld in the Middle Ages," in *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Steven Kaplan (Berlin, 1984), 19–37.

composed what may be the first stand-alone Latin visionary treatise of the Middle Ages. On 25 March 678/679, an ill monk named Barontus at the monastery of Longoretus had a vision, which one of his brothers later decided to set down in writing as a warning to sinners about the perils of the Day of Judgment.³⁷ As the monastic community was gathered around the sick monk, praying to God to “send his soul back into his body,” a battle for Barontus’s soul was being waged between two demons and the Archangel Raphael.³⁸ The upshot of this battle, as Barontus relayed in his own words after his return, was that Raphael was able to carry Barontus off to Saint Peter in the heavens to be judged. Barontus’s description makes clear that the crux of this drama was the peculiar sense of his soul separating from his body:

Extending his finger, Saint Raphael touched my throat, and in distress I at once felt my soul torn from my body. But I will report how small that soul was, as far as it was visible to me: it seemed to me to be similar in its tininess to a little chick when it exits from the egg. And likewise, that small [soul] carried with it a complete head, eyes, and the other limbs, sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch. But it was not at all able to speak until it came to the trial and received a body made of air, similar to that which it left behind here.³⁹

The wealth of descriptive details employed in this short passage creates a graphic scene. Such techniques, we can assume, were chosen in order to persuade readers of the truth of Barontus’s vision.

What we immediately perceive, however, is the difficulty that the author faced in communicating something as intangible as the soul; hence, the resort to similes. Before the soul takes on an airy body that resembles Barontus’s normal body, it can be described only as having a size *like* a chick’s, a detail that is not especially illuminating. What is clear is that the soul had some kind of physical form even before it received its airy body, or else Barontus could not have said anything

³⁷ Although the author of the text remains anonymous, he states that he was brought up by Abbot Francardus of Longoretus. For analysis of this text, see Hen, “Structure and Aims of the *Visio Baronti*” (n. 8 above), 477–83; John Contreni, “‘Building Mansions in Heaven’: The *Vision of Barontus*, Archangel Raphael, and a Carolingian King,” *Speculum* 78 (2003): 673–706; Ciccarese, “La *Visio Baronti*” (n. 8 above); Carozzi, *Le voyage de l’âme dans l’au-delà* (n. 1 above), 139–86; and Roper, “Uniting the Community” (n. 20 above).

³⁸ *Visio Baronti monachi Longoretensis* 2, ed. W. Levison, MGH, *Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum* 5 (Hanover, 1910), 377–95, at 378: “ut caelestis medicus mitteret animam in corpore.”

³⁹ *Visio Baronti* 4, ed. Levison, 380: “sanctus Rafahel extendens digito tetigit gutterem meum, et ego miser statim sensi animam meam evulsam a corpore meo. Sed et ipse animam, in quantum mihi visum fuit, quam parva sit, referam. Sic mihi videbatur, similitudinem de parvitate haberet ut pullus aviculae, quando de ovo egreditur. Sic et ipsa parva caput, oculis et cetera membra, visum, auditum, gustum, odoratum et tactum ad integrum secum portavit; sed loqui minime potest, donec ad discussionem veniat et corpore de aere recipiat similem, quem hic reliquit.”

about its initial size.⁴⁰ This small soul had, in fact, a head, although what this means is not apparent, apart from the information that the soul possessed the use of all five senses. We see here not only an implicit association between the soul and the head, but also Evodius's conviction that the soul after death must surely possess some of the five senses through which it governed the body during life.⁴¹ In this regard, it is noteworthy that Barontus's corporeal body was unable to employ its senses or limbs in movement, speech, or sight while it lay on the bed, presumably because its animating soul was not present.⁴² It is also suggestive that, when describing the departure of his soul from his body, Barontus's first-person narrative shifts to that of a (somewhat) impersonal observer: for only a few lines, the subject is "it" rather than "I." It is as if the Latin reflects Barontus's uncertainty about where his identity lies; is it still in his body, or has it been transferred to his bodiless soul? In this hiatus, Barontus can only recognize his soul as *his*, but not *him*. Yet, he reassures his audience that, at such a crucial moment as the judging of the soul, it will possess a body of air. Though the contours of the airy body remain vague, what the author of the text emphasizes is that, in the intermediate afterlife, the soul *will* have a body, one that allows individual identity and appearance to be maintained.

The author of the *Vision of Barontus* may not have been consciously responding to Evodius's set of propositions, yet the parallels are striking. The correspondences between the concerns raised by Evodius at the turn of the fifth century and the graphic "answers" provided by the *Vision of Barontus* speak to a persistent current of unease in how the disembodiment of death was imagined. To be sure, the community in which Barontus lived was not the first to consider the means of the soul's departure. In his *Dialogues* from the late sixth century, Pope Gregory the Great attempted to address anxieties about the postmortem existence of the soul by describing examples of the departing souls of saints being seen as flames, doves, and light.⁴³ He also included a handful of stories

⁴⁰ On bird imagery of the soul, see Ciccarese, "La *Visio Baronti*" (n. 8 above), 40–41, n. 44.

⁴¹ Though the author does not explicitly localize the soul in the head (early medieval theories generally fluctuated between the head and the heart), later readers seem to have found an emphasis here. See the one illustrated copy of the text from the ninth century, where Barontus's soul is depicted as a bust being carried by the archangel toward the heavens: Lawrence Nees, "The Illustrated Manuscript of the *Visio Baronti* [*Revelatio Baronti*]" in St Petersburg (Russian National Library, Cod. Oct.v.1.5)," in *Court Culture in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Catherine Cubitt (Turnhout, 2003), 91–128, at 95–98.

⁴² On Barontus and speech, see Jamie Kreiner, *The Social Life of Hagiography in the Merovingian Kingdom* (Cambridge, 2014), 89.

⁴³ On the enormous impact of the *Dialogi* in the development of the visionary tradition, see Keskiaho, *Dreams and Visions in the Early Middle Ages* (n. 1 above), esp. 93–112; Maria Pia Ciccarese, "La genesi letteraria della visione dell'aldilà: Gregorio Magno e le sue fonti," *Augustinianum* 29 (1989): 435–49; Carozzi, *Le voyage de l'âme dans l'au-delà* (n. 1 above),

about men who died, but then were quickly restored to life in order that they might recount their visitation of heaven and hell.⁴⁴ The *Dialogues*, as Matthew Dal Santo has demonstrated, was a contribution to a larger debate across the Mediterranean world about the orthodoxy of the cult of the saints and the efficacy of relics.⁴⁵ Gregory's work was frequently mentioned in Carolingian visionary texts and was instrumental in helping to shape its traditions, yet it did not answer many of the points raised by Evodius.⁴⁶

When Carolingian intellectuals began to compose their own accounts of journeys to the otherworld, the *Vision of Barontus* offered a possible model for envisioning both the course of that journey and the appearance of the soul.⁴⁷ It was apparently a popular text in the ninth century and was copied frequently as manuscript production increased sharply under Louis the Pious.⁴⁸ However, it was not the only influence on the new visionary genre. A Greek text from the fourth century that was translated into Latin as the *Vision of Paul* recounted the *bodily* ascent of the Apostle Paul into the heavens, where he toured heaven and hell with an angelic guide.⁴⁹ In his *Histories* from the late sixth century,

43–61; and Jesse Keskiaho, “Visions and the Afterlife in Gregory’s *Dialogues*,” in *Imagining the Medieval Afterlife*, ed. Pollard (n. 7 above), 225–46.

⁴⁴ Two visionaries are described as dead and then returned to life (Peter the Hermit and Stephen), while two others are described as being on the point of death when they leave the body and then quickly return (Armentarius and an unnamed soldier from Rome). See Gregory, *Dialogi* 4.27 and 4.37, ed. Adalbert de Vogüé, *Dialogues*, SC 265 (Paris, 1980), 92 and 126–30.

⁴⁵ Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints’ Cult* (n. 11 above). Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies* (n. 11 above), 200–27, situates Gregory as a thinker who mixed Neoplatonic views of an incorporeal soul with Stoicizing convictions in a material one.

⁴⁶ The *Dialogi* is explicitly referenced in the *Visio Wettini* and *Visio Bernoldi*, and it was transmitted alongside Carolingian vision texts in at least three ninth-century manuscripts. On the latter, see Keskiaho, *Dreams and Visions in the Early Middle Ages* (n. 1 above), 110, n.151, and 234.

⁴⁷ On paths (literal and allegorical) to the otherworld, see Dinzelbacher, “The Way to the Other World” (n. 36 above).

⁴⁸ See Hen, “Visions of the Afterlife” (n. 8 above), 36, which notes that of the twenty-three extant copies of the *Visio Baronti* six are from the ninth century.

⁴⁹ The origin of the *Apocalypse of Paul* is hotly debated; variants survive in many different languages, but the posited original Greek text is not extant. For a detailed overview of scholarship on this text and its development, see Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta and Jacques van der Vliet, *The Apocalypse of Paul (Visio Pauli) in Sahidic Coptic: Critical Edition, Translation and Commentary* (Leiden, 2023), 1–16 and 152–58. The earliest extant “long” Latin versions of the *Visio Pauli* are from the eighth and ninth centuries, but various redactions also survive from this period. See Theodore Silverstein, *Visio Sancti Pauli: The History of the Apocalypse in Latin Together with Nine Texts* (London, 1935). Not all versions of the *Visio Pauli* include Paul’s bodily ascent, but it is present in the earliest witness (see below). On Paul’s bodily ascent, see Vernon K. Robbins, “The Legacy of 2 Corinthians 12:2–4 in the *Apocalypse of Paul*,” in *Paul and the Corinthians: Studies on a Community in Conflict*, ed. Trevor Burke and J. Keith Elliott (Leiden, 2003), 327–39, at 336–38.

Gregory of Tours included two short stories of monks who experienced visions of the afterlife.⁵⁰ The mid-seventh-century *Life of Fursey*, about the exploits of an Irish missionary monk, featured a long visionary sequence of Fursey's otherworldly encounters with demons, angels, and a terrifying wall of fire.⁵¹ In his eighth-century *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede detailed the vision of a Northumbrian layman named Drythelm, who witnessed the fate of souls in a purgatorial vale of flame and snow.⁵² And Boniface, the mid-eighth-century English missionary to Francia, offered a lengthy description of the otherworldly judgment of a monk of Wenlock monastery.⁵³

All of the above visions were well-known to the Carolingians. Monastic and episcopal libraries possessed copies of these earlier works, and many of them were directly or indirectly referenced in the composition of new visions over the course of the ninth century.⁵⁴ It seems probable that the interest in cultivating

⁵⁰ Gregory of Tours, *Liber historiarum* 4.33 and 7.1, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison, MGH, *Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum* 1.1 (Hanover, 1951), 166 and 323–27. See Maria Pia Ciccarese, “Alle origini della letteratura delle visioni: Il contributo di Gregorio di Tours,” *Studi storico-religiosi* 5 (1981): 251–66; Allen E. Jones, *Death and Afterlife in the Pages of Gregory of Tours* (Amsterdam, 2020), 152–54, 164–65, 177, 195, and 269; Hen, “Visions of the Afterlife” (n. 8 above) 30–32; and Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority* (n. 7 above), 149–55.

⁵¹ On this text (generally assigned to the 650s and the monastery of Péronne in northern France), see Carozzi, *Le voyage de l'âme dans l'au-delà* (n. 1 above), 99–138; Brown, *Ransom of the Soul* (n. 9 above), 201–204; Maria Pia Ciccarese, “Le visioni di S. Fursa,” *Romanobarbarica* 8 (1984/5): 231–303; and Marilyn Dunn, *The Vision of St. Fursey and the Development of Purgatory* (Norwich, 2007). For the argument that Fursey's visions reflect Frankish (not Irish) traditions and Merovingian (not English) authorship, see Ian N. Wood, “Reform and the Merovingian Church,” in *Religious Franks: Religion and Power in the Frankish Kingdoms*, ed. Rob Meens et al. (Manchester, 2016), 95–111, at 107.

⁵² Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* 5.12, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), 488–99. On the vision, and Bede's sources, see Moreira, *Heaven's Purge* (n. 9 above), 152–58; Carozzi, *Le voyage de l'âme dans l'au-delà* (n. 1 above), 226–53; Gernot Wieland, “Anglo-Saxon Visions of Heaven and Hell,” in *Imagining the Medieval Afterlife*, ed. Pollard (n. 7 above), 79–98, at 84–87; and Andrew Rabin, “Bede, Drythelm, and the Witness to the Other World: Testimony and Conversion in the *Historia ecclesiastica*,” *Modern Philology* 106 (2009): 375–98.

⁵³ Boniface, *Ep.* 10 (ca. 717), ed. Michael Tangl, *Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, MGH, *Epistolae selectae* 1 (Berlin, 1916), 7–15. On the background to the vision and Boniface's influences (which included the *Visio Pauli*, Gregory's *Dialogi*, and the *Vita Fursei*), see Patrick Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600–800* (Cambridge, 1990), 243–72. On its status as the first “home-grown” English vision, see Wieland, “Anglo-Saxon Visions,” 81–83.

⁵⁴ For example, the *Visio Wettini* explicitly refers to the reading of Book 4 of the *Dialogi*: Heito, *VW* 4, ed. Dümmler, 269; and Walafrid, *VW*, lines 283–87. Dutton, *Politics of Dreaming* (n. 1 above), 73, notes that in the *Visio cuiusdam pauperulae mulieris* (discussed below) Heito borrowed elements from the vision of Drythelm and the *Visio Pauli*. In his interpretation of the *Visio Bernoldi*, Hincmar states that he has come across visions in the *Dialogi*,

a visionary genre not only encouraged the preservation of older texts, but also may have resulted in the reworking of some of these texts. For example, the earliest manuscript witnesses to redactions of the *Vision of Paul* date to the early ninth century.⁵⁵ For the first time, groups of visionary texts came to comprise discrete units within manuscripts produced in Carolingian scriptoria. This is an indication that, by the ninth century, there was a clear sense that these constituted a recognizable genre.⁵⁶

DISGUST TOWARD THE BODY

Despite the availability of these earlier works, Carolingian visionary writers for the most part seem to have employed them only tentatively as models. Several themes common to this emergent genre in the seventh and eighth centuries were, in fact, rejected by those who propelled the genre into its ninth-century flourishing. This was particularly true when it came to the mechanics of that crucial moment at which the visionary returned to the earthly realm in order to retell the sights and truths he had witnessed. Visionary narratives composed prior to the ninth century tended to depict the liberated soul expressing feelings of disgust and resentment toward the body. In Boniface's account of the vision of the monk of Wenlock, when the monk is told by his angelic guides that he must return to his body, he finds that:

Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, and the writings of Saint Boniface, and that he knows of the *Visio Wettini*. See Maaik van der Lugt, "Tradition and Revision: The Textual Tradition of Hincmar of Reims' *Visio Bernoldi* with a New Critical Edition," *Archivum Latinitatis Medii Aevi* 52 (1994): 109–49, at 147. A ninth-century library catalogue from Saint-Gall notes the possession of the *Visiones Vvettini et Baronti*, while a booklist from Reichenau notes a codex containing the third and fourth books of Gregory's *Dialogi*, the *Liber Fursei de visione eius*, excerpted versions from Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, the *Visio Baronti* and the two visions of Wettin by Heito and Walafriid. See Paul Lehmann, *Mittelalterliche Bibliothekskataloge Deutschlands und der Schweiz, vol 1: Die Bistümer Konstanz und Chur* (Munich, 1918), 84 and 259; discussed by Dutton, *Politics of Dreaming* (n. 1 above), 75.

⁵⁵ This is not to say that the redactions themselves were necessarily Carolingian. St. Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 682 (s. IX^{2/4}, possibly Fulda) contains a complete copy of Redaction VI, which was likely composed in the mid-eighth century. On redactions of the *Visio Pauli*, see Silverstein, *Visio Sancti Pauli*, 40–90; Felice Lifshitz, *Religious Women in Early Carolingian Francia: A Study of Manuscript Transmission and Monastic Culture* (New York, 2014), 73–75; Carozzi, *Le voyage de l'âme dans l'au-delà* (n. 1 above), 265–76; Lenka Jiroušková, *Die Visio Pauli: Wege und Wandlungen einer orientalischen Apokryphe im lateinischen Mittelalter unter Einschluss der altschechischen und deutschsprachigen Textzeugen* (Leiden, 2006); and Nicole Volmering, "The Adaptation of the *Visio Sancti Pauli* in the West: The Evidence of Redaction VI," *Peritia* 31 (2020): 225–54.

⁵⁶ See van der Lugt, "Tradition and Revision," 136–37; Contreni, "Building Mansions" (n. 37 above), 696–701; and Hubert Houben, "*Visio cuiusdam pauperculae mulieris*: Überlieferung und Herkunft eines frühmittelalterlichen Visionstextes (mit Neuedition)," *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins* 124 (1976): 31–42, at 33–36.

His own body, while he was outside of it, repulsed him so very much that in all those visions he saw nothing so odious, nothing so contemptible, nothing so horrifically stinky (except the demons and the blazing fire) as his very own body. And his fellow monks, whom he saw showing such mercy in carrying out death rites for his corpse, likewise repulsed him because they were taking care of that hateful body.⁵⁷

The prospect of his soul having to reoccupy the space of the flesh, even if it is described as “his very own body” fills the monk of Wenlock with dread. Precisely what is so odious about the body is not stated, except for its terrible smell, and in his report, Boniface offers no further details. At the beginning of the vision, when the monk’s soul first departs his body, the soul is said to be stripped all at once from the burden of the body (*corporis gravido*) and to suddenly see clearly those things that had previously been concealed and unknown.⁵⁸

Similarly, at the end of his tour of the afterlife, Bede’s Drythelm expresses a reluctance to re-enter his body, preferring the fragrant smells and beautiful light of the paradisiacal meadow to which his guide has taken him.⁵⁹ In the *Vision of Fursey*, the monk experiences a profound moment of disconnection from his body in the moments leading up to re-entry. Situated up high on a roof, Fursey is unable to identify the appearance of his body and an angel must order him “to recognize and take back up his own proper body. Then he, fearing the cadaver as if it were unknown to him, did not want to draw near to that thing.”⁶⁰ The angel, however, reassures Fursey that his body is clean; it is no longer polluted by sickness or sin thanks to the purging fire that Fursey has met with in the otherworld. Indeed, the guide elaborates that Fursey will not feel any pain in reoccupying his flesh except for the burns marks that appear on his body where the fire touched his soul on its journey. Fursey’s soul is then able to cross back into the body through an opening that appears in his chest.

⁵⁷ Boniface, *Ep.* 10, ed. Tangl, 15: “Proprium corpus dicebat se, dum extra fuerat, tam valde perhorrisse, ut in omnibus illis visionibus nihil tam odibile, nihil tam despectum, nihil tam durum foetorem evaporans exceptis demonibus et igne fraglante videret quam proprium corpus. Et fratres eius conservos, quos intuitus est exsequias corporis sui clementer exhibere, ideo perhorruit, quia invisī corporis curam egerunt.” On this passage, see Dinzelbacher, “Il corpo nelle visioni” (n. 21 above), 313.

⁵⁸ Boniface, *Ep.* 10, ed. Tangl, 8.

⁵⁹ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.12, ed. Colgrave and Mynors (n. 52 above), 496, conveys that, when told by his guide that he was to return to earth, Drythelm “much loathed the idea of being returned to [his] body” (*multum detestatus sum reuerti ad corpus*).

⁶⁰ *Visio Sancti Furseyi* 17, ed. Carozzi, in *Le voyage de l’âme dans l’au-delà* (n. 1 above), 677–92, at 692: “Iubeturque ab angelo proprium cognoscere et resumere corpus. Tunc ille, quasi ignotum cadaver timens, noluit se ibidem adpropinquare.” An account of Fursey’s vision was also included by Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History* 3.19, ed. Colgrave and Mynors (n. 52 above), 268–76.

Not one of the Carolingian visionary texts includes such a scene of aggrieved re-entry into the physical world. Like Wenlock and Fursey, many of the ninth-century visionaries were monks, yet despite their shared ascetic mentality there seems to have been no desire to imitate the models that the Insular ecclesiastics imparted to the Carolingians. Indeed, one of the only Carolingian accounts to include a re-entry description is the *Vision of Charles the Fat* from the late ninth century. Here, the Emperor Charles himself describes how “my very weary and frightened spirit was returned into my body” at the end of his trip to burning purgatorial valleys.⁶¹ In this case, the soul’s fearfulness is hardly attributed to the prospect of returning to the body; rather, it is the *lack* of a bodily shelter that seems to accentuate the soul’s weakened state. Likewise, in the *Life of Anskar*, an account of the missionary’s work in Scandinavia written in the early 870s by Bishop Rimbert of Hamburg-Bremen, Rimbert recounts at length a celestial vision that the holy monk experienced and that fed his zeal for martyrdom among the pagans. In relating this vision, Anskar purportedly proclaimed that it ended when “I returned to my body. In going and returning there was no effort or hindrance.”⁶² In stark contrast to Wenlock and Fursey, then, Anskar did not suggest that he viewed the body as a burden or a polluted vessel, but merely as a particular mode of existence while on earth.⁶³

TECHNIQUES OF LEAVING AND RETURNING

The *Vision of Charles the Fat* and Rimbert’s account of Anskar’s journey to the heavenly court are unusual among the visions extant from the ninth century because they explicitly indicate that their subjects spent time outside of their bodies. While he was attempting to sleep, Charles the Fat heard a voice instructing

⁶¹ *Visio Karoli [Grossi]*, ed. G. Waitz, MGH, *Scriptores* 10 (Hanover, 1852), 458: “reversus est spiritus meus in corpore meo valde fessus et conterritus.” On this text’s composition in Reims around 890, in association with Louis of Provence’s claims to succession, see Dutton, *Politics of Dreaming* (n. 1 above), 233–51; Carozzi, *Le voyage de l’âme dans l’au-delà* (n. 1 above), 359–68; and Simon MacLean, *Kingship and Politics in the Late Ninth Century: Charles the Fat and the End of the Carolingian Empire* (Cambridge, 2003), 166.

⁶² Rimbert, *Vita Anskarii* 3, ed. G. Waitz, MGH, *Scriptores rerum Germanicarum* 55 (Hanover, 1884), 23–24: “Sicque ad corpus redii. In eundo vero ac redeundo nec labor erat nec mora.” On the text’s visions, see Dutton, *Politics of Dreaming* (n. 1 above), 51–53; and Eric Knibbs, *Ansgar, Rimbert and the Forged Foundations of Hamburg-Bremen* (Burlington, 2011), 188–94 (who notes that eleven of Anskar’s twelve visions were reportedly experienced during sleep).

⁶³ For a rich discussion of Carolingian horror concerning the putrefying, worm-ridden body (in this case, joined with the soul in hell), see Matthew Bryan Gillis, “The Worm and the Corpse: Carolingian Visions of Gehenna’s Undead Cemetery,” *Journal of Medieval History* 48 (2022): 166–82.

him, “Charles, your spirit will now exit from you for a sustained period of time.” Immediately, Charles was swept up in the spirit, with someone dressed in purest white raising him upward.⁶⁴ Anskar, meanwhile, experienced a nighttime vision of his own death in which he saw his soul leaving his body and “at once, it appeared in another, most beautiful kind of body, one free from all cares and aspects of mortality.”⁶⁵ We have already explored two seventh-century visions that, likewise, speak of the soul separating from the body and then returning to it at the end of the episode (Barontus and Fursey).⁶⁶ This seems to be the model that the *Vision of Charles the Fat* follows. Anskar’s account is somewhat more problematic because it is initially framed as a vision of a *future* out-of-body experience, but it, too, includes verbs such as going (*ire*) and returning (*redire*) to the body.⁶⁷

Such verbs are exceedingly rare in Carolingian visionary literature. Instead, ninth-century authors relied on ambiguous language such as “being led” or “swept up in ecstasy” in order to signal the beginning of an otherworldly journey.⁶⁸ They avoided the suggestion that the soul could simply exit and enter the body on a whim one night. They also eschewed the notion that a body and soul whose ties had been definitively severed in death could then be reunited and the person returned to life. Thus, while the majority of pre-ninth-century visionary journeys described cases of resurrection, not a single Carolingian vision of the afterlife utilized this resurrection topos.⁶⁹

In Gregory of Tours’s account of Saint Salvius, the monks had actually washed and dressed the dead body of the saint when the corpse suddenly sprang to life to

⁶⁴ *Visio Karoli*, ed. Waitz, 458: “venit vox ad me terribiliter dicens: ‘Karole, exiet a te modo spiritus tuus in hora non modica’; statimque fui raptus in spiritu; et qui me sustulit in spiritu, fuit candidissimus.”

⁶⁵ Rimbart, *Vita Anskarii* 3, ed. Waitz, 21: “egrederetur a corpore ac statim in alia pulcherrima specie corporis omni mortalitate ac sollicitudine carentis appareret.”

⁶⁶ Compare also the eighth- or ninth-century Irish *Vision of Laisrén*, in which the protagonist falls asleep and then sees that his soul is above his body and that two angels are lifting him into the air. See John Carey, “The Vision of Laisrén,” in *The End and Beyond: Medieval Irish Eschatology*, ed. John Carey, Emma Nic Cárthaigh, and Caitríona Ó Dochartaigh, 2 vols. (Aberystwyth, 2014), 1:417–44, at 435.

⁶⁷ Rimbart, *Vita Anskarii* 3, ed. Waitz, 23–24.

⁶⁸ Speaking of visionary literature in general, Dinzelbacher, “Il corpo nelle visioni” (n. 21 above), 308–309, notes that most texts do not describe the soul leaving the body and contends that the visionary senses being in another realm without realizing that he has fallen into ecstasy and his body remains behind.

⁶⁹ On the prevalence of the resurrected visionary, see Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority* (n. 7 above), 141–43 (who suggests the conceit of the dead visionary was a Merovingian development). On the fictive death as a metaphor for the transition to the penitent life adopted by many visionaries after their journeys, see Kamphausen, *Traum und Vision* (n. 8 above), 98.

report how angels had carried him to the court of heaven.⁷⁰ In the vision of the monk of Wenlock, Boniface is explicit that he had spoken with “that man who died and was revived.”⁷¹ That man told him how his brothers were carrying out funeral rites on his body when he was forced to return into it. Similarly, Bede summarizes the experience of the layman Drythelm as that of “a man dead for some time returned to bodily life.”⁷² Indeed, Drythelm so terrified those holding vigil around his corpse when he suddenly sat up that only his wife initially heard the report of his spiritual encounters (the others having fled in fear).⁷³ Despite its ubiquity, this kind of scene is entirely absent in the visionary writings that became increasingly popular after the 820s.⁷⁴ Ninth-century authors certainly embraced dramatic and detail-rich prose in order to underscore the significance of the otherworldly episode, yet they did not imitate the model of the resurrected visionary.

The texts produced in what Dutton calls the “dream factory” of Reichenau were the first Carolingian experiments in the visionary mode, and they evince the most hesitation in using language that implies the detachment of soul from body. The two narratives of Wetti’s frightful experience — the first composed by Heito, former abbot of Reichenau, the second by Walafrid Strabo, a monk at Reichenau — both emphasize that Wetti is *not* asleep when his first vision occurs.⁷⁵ That fateful night, “having arranged his limbs on the bed, and with his eyes only just closed and not yet relaxed in sleep (*necdum in somnum*), as he

⁷⁰ Gregory of Tours, *Liber historiarum* 7.1, ed. Krusch and Levison (n. 50 above), 324. Compare the revival of Salvius (*vir, quasi de gravi somno suscitatus, excutitur*) with that of Sunniulf, whose vision is framed as a dream (*a somno excutitur*): Gregory, *Liber historiarum* 4.33, ed. Krusch and Levison, 166.

⁷¹ Boniface, *Ep.* 10, ed. Tangl (n. 53 above), 8: “mortuus est et revixit.”

⁷² Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.12, ed. Colgrave and Mynors (n. 52 above), 488: “quidam aliquandiu mortuus ad uitam resurrexit corporis.”

⁷³ A poem dated 803–821, composed by the English monk Æthelwulf, likewise titles the vision of one Merhtheof as that “about a brother who, after being led out of his body, was again revived” (*De fratre qui de carne eductus iterum reuiuiscerat*) and describes how, when “he reached his body, everyone was amazed that he was able to live after death” (*peruenit ad corpus, cunctis mirantibus illum/ uiuere post mortem*). Æthelwulf was familiar with Bede’s description of Fursey and Drythelm, and so this may account for the similarities in the accounts. Æthelwulf, *De abbatibus* 11, lines 386–87, ed. A. Campbell (Oxford, 1967), 27 and 31 (for the dating and sources of the poem, see xxiii and xlvi).

⁷⁴ That said, in the late eighth century, Alcuin incorporated Bede’s vision of Drythelm in his poem *Versus de patribus, regibus, et sanctis Euboricensis ecclesiae*, lines 876–1007, ed. and trans. Peter Godman, *The Bishops, Kings, and Saints of York* (Oxford, 1982), 72–81.

⁷⁵ It was Heito’s, rather than Walafrid’s, version of the *Visio Wettini* that seems to have been more popular with contemporaries. Pollard has currently located sixty-three manuscript witnesses to Heito’s text from the ninth through sixteenth centuries (compared to seven for Walafrid’s): “Charlemagne’s Posthumous Reputation” (n. 1 above), 532.

reported, an evil spirit arrived.”⁷⁶ Nevertheless, both Heito and Walafrid state unequivocally that Wetti “wakes up” (*expergefactus* and *evigilat*) at the conclusion of the first of the two visions that occur over the course of the night.⁷⁷

In Heito’s and Walafrid’s retelling of Wetti’s second visionary encounter, the way in which the monk’s sensory experience shifts from the concrete cloister of Reichenau to the realm of the dead is purposefully vague. While Wetti was recovering in bed from his first vision, Walafrid states simply that an angel appeared and “raising up the invalid, led him along a delightful path.”⁷⁸ This path takes the monk through various landscapes of the afterworld — a mountain encircled with a fiery river, a wooden fort filled with smoke, a row of shining mansions — until the moment when Wetti awakens in his bed to the rooster’s crow. For Heito, the second vision begins when Wetti had finally drifted off to sleep: at that point, the angel appeared and “led him along a bright path of great delight.”⁷⁹ As in Walafrid’s version, the vivid pastoral and agricultural sites witnessed by Wetti raise the possibility that the angel has taken Wetti’s soul on a spatial journey, while his body alone stayed in the monastery.⁸⁰ The terms “body” and “soul” are never used, however, in stark contrast to earlier visionary texts.

This deliberately ambiguous model was imitated by contemporaries.⁸¹ The *Vision of Rotchar*, which likely constituted a response to the *Vision of Wetti* and may have been composed at Reichenau or Reims, follows many of the inventions of Heito’s text.⁸² The monk Rotchar was lying in the infirmary on account of an

⁷⁶ Heito, *VW* 2, ed. Dümmler, 268: “Membris ergo in lectulo compositis, oculis tantummodo clausis et necdum in somnum, ut ipse fatebatur, resolutis venit malignus spiritus”; and Walafrid, *VW*, lines 206–207.

⁷⁷ Similar verbs are used at the end of the second, longer vision (*expergefactus est* and *experrectus*): Heito, *VW* 4 and 28, ed. Dümmler, 269 and 274; and Walafrid, *VW*, lines 262 and 829.

⁷⁸ Walafrid, *VW*, lines 310–11: “assumens angelus idem / Infirmum, duxitque via praecessor amoena.”

⁷⁹ Heito, *Visio Wettini* 5–6, ed. Dümmler, 269: “ipso etiam post tantam lassitudinem tam animae quam corporis in somnum resolutus, venit isdem angelus . . . assumpsit eum idem angelus et duxit per viam amoenitatis immensae praeclaram.”

⁸⁰ On the physicality of the landscape, see Claude Carozzi, “La géographie de l’au-delà et sa signification pendant le Haut Moyen Âge,” in *Popoli e paesi nella cultura altomedievale* (Spoleto, 1983), 423–81, at 454–61 and 477.

⁸¹ Direct allusions to Heito’s *Visio Wettini* appear in the *Visio cuiusdam pauperulae mulieris*, the *Visio Eucherii*, the *Visio Bernoldi*, Rimbart’s *Vita Anskarii*, and the *Annales Fuldenses*: Pollard, “Charlemagne’s Posthumous Reputation” (n. 1 above), 532–34 and 542.

⁸² *Visio Rotcharii*, ed. Wilhelm Wattenbach, “Aus Petersburger Handschriften,” *Anzeiger für Kunde der deutschen Vorzeit* 22 (1875): 72–74. Little can be said with certainty about the origins of this vision. See Dutton, *Politics of Dreaming* (n. 1 above), 61–63 and 76; Ganz, “Charlemagne in Hell” (n. 1 above), 179; and Carozzi, *Le voyage de l’âme dans l’au-delà* (n. 1 above), 341–46. Compare Nees, “The Illustrated Manuscript” (n. 41 above), 107–108, who proposes Reims, not Reichenau, as the site of composition for the *Visio Rotcharii*. The

illness, “slumped in sleep” (*sopore depressus*), when an angel suddenly appeared and “saying nothing to him, the angel began to proceed along a path of delight.” Rotchar, “led by intense love,” followed him and likewise received a tour of various abodes of the afterworld.⁸³

The invocation of sleep in both Heito’s *Vision of Wetti* and the *Vision of Rotchar* points toward the framing of the protagonist’s experience as a dream rather than an out-of-body encounter.⁸⁴ And yet, there are also clear hints that something more than a dream is being suggested.⁸⁵ A dream would not necessarily require an angelic guide; indeed, such guides had previously facilitated otherworldly journeys in cases where the visionary’s soul *did* exit the body (Barontus, Fursey, Drythelm, Wenlock, and Salvius).⁸⁶ In the example of the resurrected visionary Drythelm, Bede had used the language of an angel “leading” (*ducere*) the dead

Visio Rotcharii survives in one witness (a mid-ninth-century manuscript from Reims, examined by Nees), where it follows the one illustrated copy of the *Visio Baronti*.

⁸³ *Visio Rotcharii*, ed. Wattenbach, 73: “angelus ei nequaquam adloquens coepit praereire pro amoenitatis viam. Praefatus vero frater nimio amore ductus.”

⁸⁴ The *Visio Wettini* makes an internal reference to an earlier vision of purgatorial suffering that a certain cleric had dreamed (*somniaverat*); this vision was foolishly dismissed by the bishop for whom it was intended as the mere “delusions of dreams” (*deliramenta somniorum*) — a framing that Keskiäho, *Dreams and Visions in the Early Middle Ages* (n. 1 above), 67–69, reads as indicative of a dismissive attitude toward dream visions that Heito and Walafrid were keen to rebut among their contemporaries. Important to note, here, is that both Heito and Walafrid describe this vision, not as an otherworldly journey, but as a visitation to the dreamer: Heito, *VW* 10, ed. Dümmler, 270; and Walafrid, *VW*, lines 400–37. For the suggestion that Walafrid saw sleep as a state that might allow the soul to exit the body, see Jan Ziolkowski, “Walahfrid’s Poem about a Man Carried to Heaven by an Eagle: Parodic Vision or Serious *Illusio*?” *Poetica* 34 (1991): 1–38, at 20–21. On the Roman belief that sleep and death were different grades of separation of the soul and body, with such separation necessary for true divinatory activity, see Kamphausen, *Traum und Vision* (n. 8 above), 27–28.

⁸⁵ Scholars generally agree that the early medieval worldview did not sharply differentiate between dreams and visions and have assembled numerous examples of the linguistic overlap between *somnium* and *visio*. See Dinzelbacher, *Vision und Visionsliteratur* (n. 7 above), 29–53; Moreira, *Dreams, Visions, and Spiritual Authority* (n. 7 above), 5–8; Kamphausen, *Traum und Vision* (n. 8 above), 203–10; and Lisa Bitel, “*In visu noctis*: Dreams in European Hagiography and Histories, 450–900,” *History of Religions* 31 (1991): 39–59. Compare Keskiäho, *Dreams and Visions in the Early Middle Ages* (n. 1 above), who offers a more nuanced and geographically specific analysis of attitudes towards dreams (as phenomena that *could* sometimes be contrasted with visions).

⁸⁶ On the convention of the angelic instructor in early medieval visions, see Richard Sowerby, *Angels in Early Medieval England* (Oxford, 2016), 82–88 and 115–45, who argues that angels became part of an “average” death experience by the tenth century. On visionary guides, see also Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys* (n. 7 above), 52–55; Morgan, *Dante and the Medieval Other World* (n. 7 above), 84–107; and Kamphausen, *Traum und Vision* (n. 8 above), 102–108, who characterizes the *ductor* as a figure who leads, assists, instructs, and admonishes the visionary.

man to a valley of dead souls, language that Heito, Walafrid, and the author of the *Vision of Rotchar* replicated. Ultimately, the dozy state of sleep (or not-quite-sleep in Walafrid's text) and a narrative style that quickly glanced over the techniques of the "vision" served to obscure whether the event was to be understood as a spiritual experience of the stationary soul or a movement of the soul out of the body by means of heavenly assistance.

That Carolingian readers of the *Vision of Wetti* themselves interpreted the event differently, along a spectrum from dream to soul-journey, is evinced in the manner in which they adapted and borrowed from Heito's original text. An entry in the *Annals of Fulda* from the year 874, for example, repeated specific phrases in describing a vision that Louis the German had of his father Louis the Pious suffering torments in the afterlife and begging for assistance.⁸⁷ In this case, the author of the annals definitively pronounced the vision as something that occurred during Louis's dreams and did not reference an angelic guide as part of the episode.⁸⁸

By contrast, a visionary treatise produced at Reims, which likewise quoted Heito's text, veered much closer to an out-of-body account than a dream. In 877 (approximately fifty years after the *Vision of Wetti*), Hincmar, archbishop of Reims, circulated a letter detailing the experiences of one Bernold, a layman in his parish who had witnessed the suffering of dead counts and bishops as well as the recently deceased Emperor Charles the Bald in another world.⁸⁹ According to Hincmar, Bernold recounted in his own words what had happened while he was lying in bed near the point of death: "I was led (*ductus*) from this world to another world and came to a certain place."⁹⁰ There, he encountered the souls of many dead bishops, some of whom he recognized; one of these episcopal interlocutors, Ebbo of Reims, implored the layman's aid in securing alms and prayers for his soul from those still living. "Because permission to return to your body will be granted," as the bishop declared to Bernold, that meant that he would be able to serve as an effective intermediary between the two realms of

⁸⁷ On the parallels between the *Visio Wettini* and *Annals of Fulda*, see Pollard, "Charlemagne's Posthumous Reputation" (n. 1 above), 534–35.

⁸⁸ *Annales Fuldenses* 874, ed. F. Kurze and G. Pertz, MGH, *Scriptores rerum Germanicarum* 7 (Hanover, 1891), 82: "vidit quadam nocte in somnis genitorem suum Hludowicum imperatorem."

⁸⁹ On this vision, most likely composed by Hincmar himself, see Dutton, *Politics of Dreaming* (n. 1 above), 183–94; Carozzi, *Le voyage de l'âme dans l'au-delà* (n. 1 above), 346–59; Neiske, "Vision und Totengedenken" (n. 1 above), 157–59; Pollard, "A Morbid Efflorescence" (n. 8 above), 42–43 and 47–48; and van der Lugt, "Tradition and Revision" (n. 54 above), 109–38.

⁹⁰ *Visio Bernoldi* 2, ed. van der Lugt, "Tradition and Revision" (n. 54 above), 142: "Ductus de isto saeculo ad aliud saeculum, ueni in quendam locum."

existence.⁹¹ And, indeed, throughout the relatively long string of visionary episodes, Bernold seems to engage in an unusual sequence of encounters with men suffering punishments, interactions with men still living, and then concluding conversations with the same men released from their purgatorial punishments.⁹² In a similar manner to Ebbo, another of these interlocutors reminds Bernold that “you will go from this world to the body,” and thus, he should use the remaining years of his life to perform good works and give alms so as to ensure that when he returns to the afterlife he warrants “a good mansion.”⁹³

Such direct pronouncements by those within the vision function as signifiers that Bernold’s soul has traveled out of his body to a place of the dead. Unlike in the case of Louis the German, the narrative veers sharply away from the notion that this constitutes a dream. And yet, the landscape of Bernold’s vision, and the temporal sequence of his encounters, is far more dream-like than that experienced by Wetti, Rotchar, or Louis. Bernold is “led” into the vision and at another point is explicitly given a *ductor* to guide him, but this figure is not otherwise identified in angelic terms. Instead of moving along a path through concrete natural features, Bernold flits between a series of undefined “places” (*inde veni ad quendam locum*), marked primarily by those whom he meets there.⁹⁴ In each episode, he converses first with individuals who are dead and then with those living, without any explanation of how he is able to move between the two realms.⁹⁵ The effect is a surreal chain of conversations, which seem to occur in

⁹¹ *Visio Bernoldi* 2, ed. van der Lugt, “Tradition and Revision” (n. 54 above), 142: “Quia tibi dabitur licentia redeundi ad corpus, precamur te ego et isti confratres nostri, ut adiuvet nos.”

⁹² The men suffering punishment beg Bernold to go to their friends, relatives, and *fideles* and ask them to give alms, prayers, and oblations for their souls. Bernold does this and then immediately returns to find the sinners at peace and joyful.

⁹³ *Visio Bernoldi* 6, ed. van der Lugt, “Tradition and Revision” (n. 54 above), 147: “Tu ibis de isto saeculo ad corpus et stude per eleemosynas et alia bona opera et per bonam uitam, ut, quando huc reueneris, bonam mansionem habeas.”

⁹⁴ The phrase “*inde ueni ad quendam locum*” recurs twice in the text without any elaboration and once with the physical description “*tenebrosum*” added. In another case, Bernold’s journey is defined by a geographic feature: “*inde ueni ad quendam petram grandem et altam*.” Compare with the tenth-century visions of Flothilde, as related by Flodoard (also of Reims, like Hincmar), where there is similarly little geography in the afterlife: Carozzi, *Le voyage de l’âme dans l’au-delà* (n. 1 above), 392–96; and Geoffrey Koziol, “Flothilde’s Visions and Flodoard’s Histories: A Tenth-Century Mutation?” *Early Medieval Europe* 24 (2016): 160–84, at 167–68.

⁹⁵ One way to account for these transitions is to believe that Bernold does not actually visit the realm of the living, but has a vision of himself doing so in the future, the implication being that, after the vision ends, he will perform these requests and *then* the state of the sinners will be relieved. This is what Hincmar’s brief explanation at the end of the vision suggests. On this, see Dutton, *Politics of Dreaming* (n. 1 above), 187 and 190; and van der Lugt,

a timeless, “in-between” space. Thus, although Hincmar explicitly compares Bernold’s story to that of Drythelm, Fursey, Wenlock, and Wetti, it comes across as much less a journey to another place when compared to those travels carried out by his predecessors. While Hincmar certainly gestured to an out-of-body encounter in crafting this text, he seems to have made a conscious choice not to imitate seventh- and eighth-century English models in which the visionary was someone who died and was then resurrected.

Similarly, the *Vision of Bernold* made no use of another model of visionary encounter that was employed by multiple authors across the Carolingian realm from the later 820s onward. This model surfaces first in the *Vision of the Poor Woman of Laon*, a text that has been associated with the same community at Reichenau from which Wetti’s story emerged.⁹⁶ It set a different course to that exemplified by the sick monk, however, in not locating the vision within a bedroom or in proximity to a state of sleep. Instead, it opens by describing how a lowly woman was “swept up in ecstasy” (*in extasi rapta*) when “a certain man dressed in the habit of a monk led her, as she herself reported, to where she could perceive the rest of the saints and the punishment of sinners.”⁹⁷ As in other contemporaneous visions, the woman walks through a series of vignettes, seeing, hearing, and even conversing with a number of dead souls whom she recognizes. There is no moment of waking or return back to the body, but rather the narrative simply shifts back to the temporal world. Similar vocabulary can be found in a vision ascribed to Saint Eucher, the eighth-century bishop of Orléans, in a synodic letter composed by Hincmar of Reims and sent to Louis the German in 858.⁹⁸ Eucher was “swept up” (*raptus*) while he was at prayer. Here, it is explicitly described as “swept up to another world” from which “he was returned to himself” after he had witnessed the suffering of Louis’s great-great-grandfather, Charles Martel, with the help of his angelic guide (*ductor*).⁹⁹

“Tradition and Revision” (n. 54 above), 110–111, who states that this is a unique feature among early medieval visions.

⁹⁶ Dutton argues that the vision reflects the influence of the *Visio Wettini* and so dates it to the later 820s: *Politics of Dreaming* (n. 1 above), 70–79. Carozzi, *Le voyage de l’âme dans l’au-delà* (n. 1 above), 320–23, believes the vision was written by Heito between 818 and 822. See also Keskiäho, *Dreams and Visions in the Early Middle Ages* (n. 1 above), 66–69.

⁹⁷ Houben, “*Visio cuiusdam pauperulae*” (n. 56 above), 41: “Ducebat autem illam, ut ipsa referebat, quidam homo in monachico habitu constitutus, ubi requiem sanctorum et penam iniquorum cernebat.” For another example of a female visionary, one who witnesses the torments of sinners before being “returned to her body” (*corpori reddita est*), see an anonymous letter dated after 757: [Boniface], *Ep.* 115, ed. Tangl (n. 53 above), 247–50. On Carolingian female visionaries, see Pollard, “A Morbid Efflorescence” (n. 8 above), 54–55.

⁹⁸ See Dutton, *Politics of Dreaming* (n. 1 above), 172–76; and Patrick Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 1994), 84–86 and 91–92.

⁹⁹ The letter is preserved in the records from the Council of Quiercy (November 858), ed. W. Hartmann, in *Die Konzilien der karolingischen Teilreiche, 843–859*, MGH, *Concilia* 3

This usage of *raptus* would likely have summoned to mind an incident relayed by the Apostle Paul about a man “swept up” (*raptus*) into the third heaven, “whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know.”¹⁰⁰ The unnamed man was generally assumed to be Paul himself, but there was little consensus on how to understand this rapture among late antique and early medieval theologians. Augustine interpreted Paul’s experience as a face-to-face vision of God, possible only through the highest form of cognition, an intellectual perception of God’s incorporeal substance. Paul entered a state of ecstasy in which his soul was able to ascend and withdraw from the senses of the body to such an extent that he witnessed God’s being, an impossible state for most mortals.¹⁰¹ Indeed, Gregory the Great deemed it impossible for anyone still in the body to witness the divine essence and described Paul’s rapture as a sighting of Paradise, not a vision of God.¹⁰² For Gregory, while the soul was attached to the earthly body and distracted by its concerns, any contemplation of God was always limited and momentary.¹⁰³

Augustine’s and Gregory’s discussions emphasized *raptus* as a state of removal (or even complete detachment) of the soul from the body, a movement of the mind toward God that did not involve any physical movement.¹⁰⁴ Not all readings of Paul’s statement agreed, however. The passage in Corinthians also formed a starting point for the abovementioned Greek text known as the *Apocalypse of Paul*, rendered into Latin at some point between the fourth and sixth centuries as the *Vision of Paul*. The earliest extant manuscript of this Latin version describes how Paul, “while [he] was in the body in which [he] was swept up (*raptus*) to the third heaven,” was led by an angel above the firmament of the earth and saw a river flowing with milk and honey, the city of Christ, and the Paradise of

(Hanover, 1984), 415: “in oratione positus ad alterum est saeculum raptus . . . Qui in se reversus.”

¹⁰⁰ 2 Cor. 12:2: “Scio hominem in Christo ante annos quattuordecim, sive in corpore nescio, sive extra corpus nescio, Deus scit, raptum eiusmodi usque ad tertium caelum.”

¹⁰¹ See Csaba Németh, “*Paulus raptus* to *Raptus Pauli*: Paul’s Rapture (2 Cor 12:2–4) in the Pre-Scholastic and Scholastic Theologies,” in *A Companion to St. Paul in the Middle Ages*, ed. Steven R. Cartwright (Leiden, 2013), 349–92, at 349–59. On Augustine’s theory of intellectual perception and its reception in the early Middle Age, see Keskiäho, *Dreams and Visions in the Early Middle Ages* (n. 1 above), 137–213.

¹⁰² See Németh, “*Paulus raptus*,” 360–63, with Gregory, *Moralia in Iob* 8.29 and 17.26, ed. M. Adriaen, CCSL 143, 143A, and 143B (Turnhout, 1979–1985), 420 and 871–73.

¹⁰³ Gregory, *Moralia in Iob* 31.51, ed. Adriaen, 1619–21. On Gregory’s understanding of contemplation, see Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism: 500 to 1200 A.D.* (New York, 1994), 50–74. On Gregory’s (loose) differentiation among dreams, waking visions, near-death revelations, and out-of-body journeys, see Keskiäho, “Visions and the Afterlife” (n. 43 above), 228–34.

¹⁰⁴ Dinzelsbacher, *Vision und Visionsliteratur* (n. 7 above), 50–53, describes *raptus* as the exit of the soul from the body and gives the *Visio Baronti* as an example.

Adam and Eve, as well as the abyss of sinners and their various punishments.¹⁰⁵ Here, Paul's movements through the cosmos are clearly defined as embodied, and the landscapes and souls he witnesses (just as in the *Vision of Wetti*) are depicted in material terms.¹⁰⁶

Although the *Vision of Paul* was known to several ninth-century authors of visionary literature, no author employing the term *raptus* states explicitly that the visionary was "swept up in the body" like the Apostle.¹⁰⁷ This may be suggested in the vision of the poor woman, but it is definitively not the case in the *Vision of Charles the Fat*, where Charles is described as "swept up in the spirit" (*raptus in spiritu*) when his soul exits his body.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, in his *Book of Revelations* from the early 850s, the suffragan bishop Audradus Modicus recalled his sight of the heavenly court (with Jesus, Mary, and the martyrs).¹⁰⁹ He defined this as occurring when "the spirit [of God] swept him up before the Lord."¹¹⁰ He was also able to make true predictions about the future when, as he states, "a withdrawal of the mind came upon me and the spirit of the Lord swept me up into the heavens."¹¹¹ More than any other Carolingian visionary text,

¹⁰⁵ The earliest extant long Latin version of the *Visio Pauli* is found in Paris, BnF, nouv. acq. lat. 1631, fols. 2v–25v, a composite manuscript with the *Visio Pauli* in a ninth-century hand from southern Francia. On this witness, see Jiroušková, *Die Visio Pauli* (n. 55 above), 145–46; and Theodore Silverstein and Anthony Hilhorst, *The Apocalypse of Paul: A New Critical Edition of Three Long Latin Versions* (Geneva, 1997), 23–28. Quoted here is *Visio Pauli* 3, ed. Silverstein and Hilhorst, 68: "Qui dum in [cor]pore essem qua raptus sum usque ad tercium celum."

¹⁰⁶ Redaction VI, which survives in one complete copy (St. Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 682, s. IX^{2/4}), does not frame Paul's journey as embodied. See *Visio Pauli* 1, ed. Volmering, "The Adaption" (n. 55 above), 244: "Sanctus Paulus ductus est in regnum Dei."

¹⁰⁷ The only early medieval vision of which I am aware that utilizes an in-the-body journey to the afterlife is Saint Guthlac's vision as recorded in his *vita* by the English monk Felix (ca. 730), as noted by Wieland, "Anglo-Saxon Visions" (n. 52 above), 88–89.

¹⁰⁸ *Visio Karoli*, ed. Waitz (n. 61 above), 458. Compare with the monk of Wenlock who, though dead, is also described as *raptus*: Boniface, *Ep.* 10, ed. Tangl (n. 53 above), 8: "extra corpus suum raptus in spiritu vidit."

¹⁰⁹ This was the twelfth book of a thirteen-book work that Audradus gave to Pope Leo IV in 849 and later revised; only fragments of the *revelationes* now survive. See Audradus Modicus, *Liber revelationum*, ed. Ludwig Traube, in "O Roma nobilis: Philologische Untersuchungen aus dem Mittelalter," *Abhandlungen der philosophisch-philologischen Klasse der Königlich Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 19 (1891): 374–91; Dutton, *Politics of Dreaming* (n. 1 above), 128–56; and Walter Mohr, "Audradus von Sens, Prophet und Kirchenpolitiker (um 850)," *Archivum Latinitatis Medii Aevi* 29 (1959): 239–67.

¹¹⁰ Audradus, *Revelatio* 2, ed. Traube, 379: "rapuit eum spiritus ante dominum."

¹¹¹ There are ten visions in Audradus's surviving *Book of Revelations*. These use, on the whole, similar terminology to describe the mechanisms of his visioning: Audradus, *Revelatio* 4, ed. Traube, 379–80: "cecidit super me mentis excessus et rapuit me spiritus domini in excelsis." Compare Peter's experience in Acts 10:10: "cecidit super eum mentis excessus."

Audradus's presentation of the mechanics of his otherworldly encounter seems to resemble that of Paul as interpreted by Augustine and Gregory.¹¹²

Thus, with the exception of Charles the Fat, one cannot conclude that any Carolingian visionary underwent a type of *raptus* that involved, unambiguously, the separation of soul and body.¹¹³ Instead, *raptus* appears to be employed primarily in order to designate a kind of movement out of the self that does not actually comprise severing the bonds with the body and leaving it behind. In his treatise on the nature of the soul from 800, Alcuin had defined a state of the soul in which, "if it eagerly desires to contemplate God or itself or another spiritual matter, it withdraws itself from the senses of the body lest they cause an impediment to it while examining spiritual matters. Indeed, often it will be affected to such an extent by a particular thought that, although it holds the eyes open, it does not see what is before it nor comprehend a voice speaking nor sense a body touching it."¹¹⁴ While the visions under discussion involve a journey to the afterlife and not, for the most part, personal encounters with God, the process and condition Alcuin describes seems like a form of internal spiritual contemplation (*extasis*) that the poor woman, Eucher, and Audradus may have experienced.¹¹⁵ Works relatively contemporaneous to the *Vision of the Poor Woman* likewise employ the term *extasis* to indicate a type of paralysis, similar to a deep sleep, in which the individual appears to be present in the body, but in reality is witnessing events "in another place."¹¹⁶

¹¹² It should also be noted that, of the visions examined here, Audradus is the only visionary not to see the realms of the dead. His otherworldly journeys focus on sightings of the heavenly court, including saints advocating for sinners before Christ.

¹¹³ Compare with the vision of an English priest reported in the *Annales Bertiniani* (839), ed. Félix Grat, Jeanne Viellard, and Suzanne Clémencet (Paris, 1964), 29: "Visio cuiusdam religiosi praebiteri de terra Anglorum, quae post Natalem Domini ei rapto a corpore ostensa est."

¹¹⁴ Alcuin, *De ratione animae* 7, ed. Curry (n. 24 above), 56–57: "Si enim vel Deum vel seipsam vel spiritale aliquid considerare gestit avertit se a sensibus carnis ne fiant ei impedimento spiritalia rimanti. Saepe etiam in tantum affectata erit qualibet cogitatione ut quamvis apertos habeat oculos quae praesto sunt non vidit nec sonantem vocem intellegit nec tangentem corpus sentit." Compare this to Alcuin's description of holding a young man in his arms while he underwent a visionary experience, in *Versus de patribus*, lines 1619–20, ed. and trans. Godman (n. 74 above), 130: "inque meis recubans manibus, tunc spiritus eius/ est raptus subito, corpusque remansit inane." No suggestion is made that the man has died (in contrast to Drythelme), but rather the soul appears to have withdrawn and then returned to the body.

¹¹⁵ Though Alcuin does not use the term *extasis* in the *De ratione animae*, Curry gives as the source for this passage Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram* 12.12, where Augustine defines *extasis* as a state in which the soul is alienated from the bodily faculties. On Alcuin's discussion here, see Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies* (n. 11 above), 294–95.

¹¹⁶ See *Vita Alcuini* 7, ed. W. Arndt, MGH, *Scriptores* 15.1 (Hanover, 1887), 188–89: "subito eius spiritus in extasi ducitur . . . Cumque hac teneretur visione mirabilia, sui in

Thus, whether in the more dream-like model advanced in the *Vision of Wetti* or in the rapture-based model of the *Vision of the Poor Woman*, Carolingian visionary writings steered clear of invoking the separation of body and soul in journeys to the afterlife. This lasted until the 870s, when such hesitancy seems to have faded, and both Charles the Fat and the missionary Anskar became the subject of visions that marked a change in discourse. Rimbert's account of Anskar's experience was the only Carolingian visionary text that came close to adopting the imagery of the *Vision of Barontus*.¹¹⁷ Just like the seventh-century monk, Anskar was able to see his own soul leaving his body and assuming another partner, a more beautiful and immortal kind of body.¹¹⁸

THE VIEW FROM THEOLOGICAL TREATISES

Carolingian visionary texts were intended to be dramatic, their sketch of post-mortem punishments terrifyingly real; readers were meant to be persuaded of both the truth of the vision and the intense need to repent. So why did the ninth-century "birth" of this genre witness a stifling, not intensification, of the narrative devoted to the journey of the visionary? Answering that question demands that we consider the material conditions that underpinned a sighting of the afterlife. The most narrative potential lay in the out-of-body experience because that allowed for an uninterrupted first-person description as well as a clear point of transition between the visible world of the living and the unseen world of the angels, demons, and dead. Yet, what we see in the ninth century is a new reluctance to suggest that the bonds holding the body and soul together could be so easily broken as to allow for the soul to leave and then re-enter its

eum oculos vertentes nimia cum admiratione condiscipuli, nempe qui nichil videbatur habere sanguinis, conantur quasi dormientem excitare"; and Agnellus of Ravenna, *Liber pontificalis ecclesiae Ravennatis* 14, ed. Deborah Deliyannis, CCCM 199 (Turnhout, 2006), 156: "subito sanctus uir in extasim factus est, uelut sopore detineretur, nec pleniter dormiens aut uigilans."

¹¹⁷ Though this is true when it comes to visions of the afterlife, there is some resemblance between the experiences of Barontus and the nun Hathumoda, who is described as leaving her body and flying between heaven and earth in some other corporeal form in her *vita* from around 875: Agius, *Vita Hathumodae* 12, ed. G. Pertz, MGH, *Scriptores* 4 (Hanover, 1841), 170, noted by Kamphausen, *Traum und Vision* (n. 8 above), 164.

¹¹⁸ Rimbert, *Vita Anskarii* 3, ed. Waitz (n. 62 above), 21. Later in the same text (*Vita Anskarii* 36, ed. Waitz, 70), Rimbert distinguishes three modes of visioning that Anskar experienced: dreams (*somnium*), direct communication from God (*intima reuelatio in mente*, as in Acts 8:29), and withdrawal (*excessus*). *Excessus* seems the most likely candidate for Anskar's vision of his own death, but other contemporaneous uses of *excessus* (often *mentis excessus*) do not describe a separation of soul and body. On this passage, see Kamphausen, *Traum und Vision* (n. 8 above), 205–207.

bodily home. These were bonds that were severed only at death, when the soul deserted its home definitively.

In his treatise for Charlemagne's cousin from 800, Alcuin was adamant that the soul did not possess "the power of exiting from the flesh and returning again into it, but by his will who made it and sent it into the flesh."¹¹⁹ The soul was the crucial link between God and the body, endowing the flesh with life and governing it by means of a divinely imprinted rationality. Like God, the soul was incorporeal and invisible but unlike that superior to it, it was "contained" (*circumscriptus*) within the fleshy members: while the soul was fully present in every part of the body, God was "everywhere present and everywhere whole" (*ubique praesens ubique tota*) throughout the entire cosmos.¹²⁰ Similarly, Alcuin emphasized, although the soul was able to contemplate matters and places far from the body, it did not "depart from its seat [the body] in order to consider something," but rather, whenever it departed its home, the body, it proceeded directly to the judgment of God and then entered a fitting waiting place for the last days and its reunion with the flesh.¹²¹

That the bond uniting body and soul underwent a profound severing in death was not in doubt, but how precisely the soul was affixed to the body during life remained a long-standing philosophical conundrum that seems to have particularly engaged ninth-century intellectuals. The problem centered on materiality: if the soul were absolutely incorporeal, then logically it could not be localized in a specific space or delimited by physical boundaries. Alcuin largely remained silent on this conundrum, but his student Candidus Wizo tackled the issue head-on, outlining a kind of spectrum of incorporeality, in which only God was truly incorporeal. The soul, by contrast, was "called incorporeal," but was "in a certain way corporeal" when compared to God and could thus be constrained within the material world.¹²²

With language such as this, Carolingian writers on the soul evince a continual, if veiled, doublespeak on the theological point of Neoplatonic incorporeality so important to Church Fathers like Augustine. It is true that all of the ninth-century authors of theological treatises on the soul state categorically that the

¹¹⁹ Alcuin, *De ratione animae* 6, ed. Curry (n. 24 above), 55: "non habens in se potestatem exeundi de carne et redeundi iterum in eam sed eius arbitrio qui fecit eam carnique immisit."

¹²⁰ Alcuin, *De ratione animae* 4 and 6, ed. Curry (n. 24 above), 51 and 54.

¹²¹ Alcuin, *De ratione animae* 4 and 6, ed. Curry (n. 24 above), 50 and 55: "Non quod anima exeat de sede sua ad cognoscendum aliquid sed in seipsa manet."

¹²² Candidus Wizo, "Num Christus (*Ep.* 39)," ed. E. Dümmler, MGH, *Epistolae* 4 (Berlin, 1895), 558: "Deus sicut summus spiritus est, sic et summe incorporalis est. Hoc autem ideo dico, quia et angeli et animae et quicumque spiritus creati sunt, licet incorporales et dicantur et sint, eius tamen incorporalitatibus et, ut ita dicam, spiritualitatis comparatione corporales quodammodo sunt." On this letter and its sources, see Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies* (n. 11 above), 300–305.

soul is an incorporeal, indivisible substance. However, most follow this with declarations that significantly undermine a belief in true incorporeality. In his mid-ninth-century treatise, Hincmar of Reims devoted a chapter to defending the soul's incorporeality only to end said chapter by announcing that, although the soul is not a body, it "is believed to possess a corporeal likeness."¹²³ Similarly, Hincmar's contemporaneous adversary, Gottschalk of Orbais, undercut the tenets of strict immateriality with his argument that every soul originated when God cleaved it from the souls of its parents at the same moment that the body came into being from the seeds of the conjugal union (a scenario that implied souls were divisible in a manner comparable to physical matter).¹²⁴ A few years later, the famed exegete Hrabanus Maurus asserted that the soul was incorporeal, and thus not delimited by lines or forms, but then proceeded to explain that it "did not preside equally in all the members" of the body, but took as its principal seat the head, due to its lofty position and spherical shape. In other words, the soul *could* be located within a defined space.¹²⁵ In this way, theological texts relied on a style of ambiguity, similar to that which I have suggested underpinned contemporaneous visionary literature.

One of the only Carolingian thinkers to adhere to an uncompromising incorporeal definition of the soul was Ratramnus of Corbie, who, in a treatise likely addressed to the court of Charles the Bald around 850, argued that the soul was restrained to the body only by the characteristics of its own nature.¹²⁶ Whereas

¹²³ Hincmar, *De diversa et multiplici animae ratione ad Carolum calvum regem*, PL 125, cols. 929–952, at 933C: "In his namque, etsi non corpus quod non est ipsa cernitur, tamen similitudinem corpoream habere creditur." Concerning doubts about the authorship of this treatise, see Mathon, "L'anthropologie chrétienne en Occident" (n. 26 above), 2:247–51.

¹²⁴ Although often considered a devoted follower of Augustine's teachings, Gottschalk here endorses an argument about the soul to which Augustine never committed: Gottschalk, *Quaestiones de anima*, ed. Cyrille Lambot, in *Oeuvres théologiques et grammaticales de Godescalc d'Orbais* (Louvain, 1945), 283–94, at 289–91. Compare Augustine, *De quantitate animae* 31, ed. Hörmann (n. 27 above), 208–12. On Gottschalk's reading of Augustine, see Matthew Bryan Gillis, *Heresy and Dissent in the Carolingian Empire: The Case of Gottschalk of Orbais* (Oxford, 2017), 79–106, 118–28, and 136–37.

¹²⁵ Hrabanus, *Tractatus de anima*, PL 110, cols. 1109–1120, at 1114B: "Quamvis autem anima totius corporis membris sit diffusa . . . tamen ut evidentibus indiciis manifestatur, non aequaliter omnibus praesidet membris."

¹²⁶ André Wilmart, "L'opuscule inédit de Ratramne sur la nature de l'âme," *Revue bénédictine* 43 (1931): 207–23, at 213. The circumstances prompting Ratramnus's and Hincmar's treatises on the soul remain obscure, but it seems probable that Charles the Bald solicited explanations from various intellectuals in the wake of theological controversy (possibly stemming from the predestination dispute involving Gottschalk of Orbais). On this, see Wilmart, "L'opuscule," 208; Mathon, "L'anthropologie chrétienne en Occident" (n. 26 above), 2:282–92; and Jean-Paul Bouhot, *Ratramne de Corbie: Histoire littéraire et controverses doctrinales* (Paris, 1976), 41–50. A series of headings also survive in Gottschalk's writings that align with issues discussed in the treatises by Ratramnus and Hincmar and may indicate his participation in this controversy: Gottschalk, *Responsa de diversis [VI]*, ed. Lambot, in *Oeuvres théologiques*, 131.

Alcuin had defined the soul as “circumscribed by the individual members of its body,” Ratramnus maintained that a truly incorporeal entity could neither be localized nor circumscribed, and thus the soul was “contained by no limit of the body.”¹²⁷ However, his was evidently a minority opinion. All other Carolingian intellectuals who wrote on the nature of the soul resisted a formulation that made the connections between body and spirit seem contingent and nebulous. Indeed, Hincmar’s treatise, which was composed under similar circumstances to Ratramnus’s, suggests that the soul’s containment *within* the body was an issue of particular concern to the Carolingian elite at Charles the Bald’s court in the middle of the ninth century. This work was dedicated to Charles the Bald, and Hincmar states that it was prompted by the circulation of a short booklet addressing different aspects of the soul.¹²⁸ In stark contrast to Ratramnus, Hincmar declared that the soul could be called localized (*localis*) because it clung to the body, and he assembled a long collection of scriptural and patristic quotations to prove that “although it is a spirit, the soul is contained by the body in a miraculous and ineffable way.”¹²⁹ Indeed, over the course of answering “whether the soul is held spatially in the body” (*utrum anima localiter teneatur in corpore*), the bishop’s tone evinced a mounting urgency, such that by the end of the section he seemed to be bellowing in a frenzy: “Look how many and what types of proofs (not mere arguments) show us that souls are clothed by, joined with, and bound to bodies. It seems dangerous to us to oppose their authority.”¹³⁰ If anyone does not believe these proofs, Hincmar continued, that person should be banished from the communion of the faithful. That the soul’s adherence to the body was a sore point, at least for the bishop of Reims, is hard to miss.

Like Alcuin had done, Hincmar made clear that, while the soul can detach itself and remove itself from the bodily senses, as occurs in sleep, or can be led away through a departure of the mind, as occurs in ecstasy, it is only totally separated from the body in death.¹³¹ Along similar lines, the authors of ninth-century visions (Hincmar among them) declined to endorse a model of temporary death followed by resurrection

¹²⁷ Alcuin, *De ratione animae* 6, ed. Curry (n. 24 above), 54: “circumscribitur in singulis suae carnis membris totus”; and Ratramnus, *De anima*, ed. Wilmart, “L’opuscule inédit,” 211: “non est circumscribita, quoniam nullo corporis fine concluditur.”

¹²⁸ Hincmar makes explicit reference to Charlemagne being the recipient’s grandfather: *De diversa*, PL 125, col. 931C–D. On the prompt, see n. 126, above.

¹²⁹ Hincmar, *De diversa* 2, PL 125, col. 933C: “At vero animam, cum sit spiritus, corpore contineri mirabilia atque ineffabili modo Scripturarum novimus auctoritate sacrarum.” According to Migne’s edition (at col. 948A), the oldest manuscript witness to Hincmar’s text includes a series of quotations from Augustine’s works under the title *Quod anima sit in corpore*.

¹³⁰ Hincmar, *De diversa* 2, PL 125, col. 936B: “Ecce quot et qualibus non argumentis, sed documentis ostenditur nobis animas corporibus vel indutas, vel colligatas, vel vinctas. Quorum auctoritati pericolosum videtur nobis refragari.”

¹³¹ Hincmar, *De diversa* 1, PL 125, col. 933B: “vel cum se abducit et removet a sensibus corporis, quod fit in somnis cum multiplicibus visis occupatur, vel cum per ectasin, id est mentis excessum, in diversa abducitur, seu cum tota separatur a corpore, quod fit in morte.”

and thus contributed to the belief that death was a strict point of no-return. There was no Carolingian version of a Saint Salvius or monk of Wenlock. Furthermore, when at death the soul *did* exit the corpse, it did so on its own and not within another, alternative body, Hincmar pointed out, citing Augustine's aforementioned letter to Evodius.¹³² This, then, invalidated the scenario depicted by the *Vision of Barontus*, although that text was evidently read and enjoyed by the Carolingian elite. In fact, Hincmar almost certainly was closely familiar with Barontus's narrative and deemed the text edifying for Charles the Bald, but that makes his decision not to follow its model in the composition of the *Vision of Bernold* all the more striking.¹³³ For Hincmar and most of the other visionary authors, the suggestion of the soul coming and going from the body threatened the very coherence of the individual, the belief that each soul was divinely matched to its own proper body. The soul originated at the same time that the physical body came into being, and it possessed no other body than that flesh.¹³⁴ This was a relationship broken only temporarily for the intermediate afterlife, the time between one person's death and the communal Last Judgment.

And yet, this did not mean that the bonds between body and soul could not be "loosened" during life on earth, or so the authors of ninth-century visions seem to imply.¹³⁵ A clear motif that emerges within this budding genre is the prominent role of illness. Like Barontus and Fursey, who were dreadfully sick before experiencing their visions, Wetti had that nasty turn after taking a draught; Rotchar, similarly, was lying in the monastic infirmary on account on sickness when his vision occurred; and Bernold fared even worse, for he was lying "as if dead" (*velut exanimis*), such that those standing by his bed could scarcely sense his breath going in and out, when he had his encounter.¹³⁶ While Carolingian authors jettisoned other elements of

¹³² Hincmar, *De diversa* 3, PL 125, col. 936C.

¹³³ See the analysis of an illustrated manuscript of the *Visio Baronti* (likely produced in Reims in the mid-ninth century), and its connection with the artistic culture of Charles the Bald's court, by Nees, "Illustrated Manuscript" (n. 41 above). Contreni, "Building Mansions" (n. 37 above), 697–704, suggests that the manuscript was a gift for Charles and outlines a further linguistic connection among the *Visio Baronti*, Hincmar, and Charles.

¹³⁴ Augustine was hesitant to pronounce on the origins of the soul, and Alcuin's *De ratione animae* imitated his restraint. When in the late 820s this lack of consensus led to the suggestion that souls existed prior to their bodies, Bishop Agobard of Lyons responded with alacrity, insisting that there was doctrinal consensus that the soul was created at the exact same moment as the body with which it was united: Agobard, *Ep.* 13, ed. E. Dümmler, MGH, *Epistolae* 5 (Berlin, 1899), 217. On this exchange between Fredegisus of Tours and Agobard, see John Marenbon, *From the Circle of Alcuin to the School of Auxerre: Logic, Theology, and Philosophy in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1981), 62–66.

¹³⁵ See Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys* (n. 7 above), 45; and Kamphausen, *Traum und Vision* (n. 8 above), 127.

¹³⁶ The priest (from whom Hincmar received the story) came to Bernold's bedside to give him confession, communion, and holy unction because he was nearly at the point of death (*ingraescente ualitudine, pene usque ad mortem peruenit*): *Visio Bernoldi* 1, ed. van der Lugt, "Tradition and Revision" (n. 54 above), 140.

the visionary mode they had inherited, they retained with notable consistency the occurrence of illness as a specific stage leading up to the visionary event.¹³⁷ In order for the truthfulness of the vision to remain without doubt, authors had to be clear that this was no mere dream. There existed a real divide between this world in the body and the next world of the spirit, and readers needed to be reassured that the visionary had entered this alternate realm. One signpost for this transition was the assistance of an angelic guide; the other was illness.

Drawing attention to differing levels of skepticism toward dreams among early medieval English, Spanish, and Frankish societies, Jesse Keskiäho has argued that Carolingian visionary texts generally assumed dreams to hold the same truth-value as visions.¹³⁸ As proof, Keskiäho points to the Reichenau textual community, which, in his reading, unproblematically framed experiences like Wetti's as dreams.¹³⁹ If we are to accept Wetti's journey as a dream, however, we should ask why a dream would require a trigger like extreme sickness. Crucially, Wetti is still alive during the visionary incident, and when he awakes, the brothers check for signs of death on his person, but find no paleness in the face, no emaciation, no stiffness in his limbs, no depletion in his veins and reassure him that he will live into the future.¹⁴⁰ Their actions evince the belief that the body can be read for signs of the dissolution of the soul-body union. And, though they fail to see such signs, the story ends with Wetti's death. It is not sleep but the proximity of death that stimulates the titular character's otherworldly travels; thus, though dream-like, Wetti's vision is no dream.¹⁴¹

In his *On the Nature of the Soul*, Alcuin treated sickness as a breakdown in the mechanisms by which the soul fulfilled its function to govern the body. When the materials of the body were disordered, the soul did not have the tools at its disposal to administer its home properly; this caused it pain, and, if the disorder could not be

¹³⁷ They may have been influenced by Gregory's thoughts here: *Dialogi* 4.27, ed. de Vogüé (n. 44 above), 86 and 92, indicates that those about to die may see heavenly things with the incorporeal eye, not in a dream, but in full consciousness. On this idea, see Keskiäho, "Visions and the Afterlife" (n. 43 above), 228.

¹³⁸ By contrast, Keskiäho contends that early medieval English and Spanish texts evince greater skepticism toward dreams and sought to distinguish them from true visions: *Dreams and Visions in the Early Middle Ages* (n. 1 above), 46–75.

¹³⁹ Keskiäho, *Dreams and Visions in the Early Middle Ages* (n. 1 above), 33–34 and 69, notes that this may not have been the only attitude among the Carolingian elite and suggests Einhard's treatment of visions in his *Translatio sanctorum Marcellini et Petri* indicates a greater carefulness with dreams.

¹⁴⁰ Heito, *VW* 29, ed. Dümmler, 274–75. Here we witness a clear reference to the use of *signa mortis* (signs of death) often copied into Carolingian medical compendia. On these texts and their significance in new rites for the dying, see Frederick S. Paxton, "Signa mortifera: Death and Prognostication in Early Medieval Monastic Medicine," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 67 (1993): 631–50.

¹⁴¹ Here I differ from Keskiäho, "Visions and the Afterlife" (n. 43 above), 238, who believes that the two visions of Wetti "make no attempt to claim they are anything other than dreams."

rectified, it broke the soul's attachment to the flesh.¹⁴² Similarly, Hrabanus noted that when a person experienced a significant loss of blood, the soul "is seen to desert the little home of the body," although, as a spiritual substance, in no way does it "make an end with that home."¹⁴³ Extreme illness or injury, then, was understood as an event that began to loosen the bonds tying the soul to the body. Just so, the attention devoted to Wetti's illness and the proximity of his death was meant to underscore to a Carolingian reader the extent to which the relaxation of the ties binding the soul to the body was conducive to a true visionary encounter.

In conclusion, although this study has focused primarily on visionary texts, a brief comparison of these with contemporaneous theological treatises points strongly to the need not to draw overly strict boundaries between the two genres. There has been a tendency to cast early medieval visions as windows onto common belief, able to exploit, in some fashion, a reservoir of folklore about the soul that resisted the high theology of Carolingian reformers.¹⁴⁴ Yet, authors of the visionary texts were not blissfully unaware of centuries of Christian thought about the nature of the soul, nor were they ignorant of the role they played in crafting an understanding of identity.¹⁴⁵ After all, not only did individuals such as Hincmar author both visionary texts and a theological treatise on the soul, but also the audiences for both genres were broadly the same: monastic houses and royal and ecclesiastical members of the court. To suggest that visionary narratives embraced an embodied notion of the soul and afterlife, while doctrinal treatises adhered to a patristic principle of incorporeality is to ignore the middle ground that both sets of authors, for the most part, attempted to fashion.

One genre was not inevitably more intellectual than the other, but rather, each was subject to different concerns and constraints, given the influence of earlier models. The theological texts sought to delimit a patristic tradition insistent on incorporeality, even though they did so subtly and without directly challenging the line of thought we have traced here back to Augustine's dialogue with Evodius. Consequently, for all their efforts to define and clarify the nature of the soul (after a three-hundred-year hiatus of a Latin *De anima* tradition), these Carolingian works ultimately offered little guidance in terms of how to speak about the soul as a concrete entity, one capable of existing and perceiving outside of the body. It follows naturally, then, that the authors of visionary narratives displayed a great deal more reticence in presenting what we might cheekily call a "fully fleshed out" description of the soul when compared to their

¹⁴² Alcuin, *De ratione animae* 7, ed. Curry (n. 24 above), 57.

¹⁴³ Hrabanus, *Tractatus de anima* 1 (n. 125 above), col. 1110B: "quamvis defectione sanguinis habitaculum corporis deserere videatur. Sed aliud est quacunq[ue] occasione habitaculum deserere: aliud cum ipso habitaculo finiri."

¹⁴⁴ Le Goff, "Learned and Popular Dimensions" (n. 36 above), 25–33; and Carozzi, *Le voyage de l'âme dans l'au-delà* (n. 1 above), 383–87.

¹⁴⁵ On differences and intersections between visionary and theological texts, see Foxhall Forbes, "The Theology of the Afterlife in the Early Middle Ages" (n. 9 above), 156–60.

Merovingian predecessors. Even as an author like Rimbert drew vivid scenes of a soul standing before the heavenly court, he vigorously reminded his peers that “there was nothing corporeal there, but all of them were incorporeal, although they possessed the form of bodies and in this way were indescribable.”¹⁴⁶ Here was an account that, although it bore many parallels to the *Vision of Barontus*, was by no means endorsing its perspective on the operations of souls and bodies.

Uncertainty regarding the soul’s appearance and existence after death was in no way limited to the ninth century, but for a period that contributed significantly to the development of a medieval visionary tradition, the reticence of Carolingian authors stands out. The lively outpouring of literary activity in crafting scenes of the afterlife did not, it would seem, override or ignore concerns about upholding orthodox teachings, even if the very boundaries of orthodoxy were not entirely clear when it came to the soul’s postmortem existence. Given how few visionary texts survive from before the ninth century, when discussing the genre, it is tempting to speak in terms of processes of accretion and teleological development. However, alongside examples of imitation and replication, conscious distancing and deviation marked the relationship between early Carolingian visions and those that came previously. Similarly, even among Carolingian thinkers, there was notable experimentation with different concepts, and, by the 870s, there are suggestive hints that visionary conventions were changing.¹⁴⁷ None of this is particularly surprising, given that penitential practices for the dead were not a stable system, but were often regional developments that started to come into sharper focus in the course of the Carolingian reforms. Nevertheless, attention to the silences and ambiguities in ninth-century visionary narratives illuminates one more crack in the enduring construction of the early Middle Ages as a period lacking in creative problem-solvers, especially when intellectuals, authors, and story tellers were grappling with matters of theological import.

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¹⁴⁶ Rimbert, *Vita Anskarii* 3, ed. Waitz (n. 62 above), 23: “Nam nihil corporeum erat ibi; sed erant cuncta incorporea, licet speciem corporum habentia et ideo ineffabilia.” Rimbert adds also the detail that when Saints Peter and John took Anskar’s soul away from the purgatorial fire to the abode of the saints they led him “walking with a motionless step along an incorporeal path” (*gressu immobili sine via corporea ambulantes*).

¹⁴⁷ Koziol’s study of the historian Flodoard of Reims points to a similar trajectory of new forms of visionary writing in the tenth-century post-Carolingian world: Koziol, “Flothilde’s Visions” (n. 94 above), 167–70 and 178.