

THE ALLEGORICAL MISTRESS: VISIONARY LITERATURE AS A CROSS-CONFESSIONAL GENRE IN MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN SPAIN

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HOW TO MAKE VISIONS WITH WORDS

The intersection of literary and visual studies is among the most attractive and most timely topics that György Szönyi has explored in his scholarly work. His research on the emblematic way of seeing has shown us an approach to cultural creation in which textual and iconic media intersect and permeate one another.¹ One striking observation that results from Szönyi's research on multimediality is the transformative effect that it exerts on cultural boundaries. Emblematic seeing and reading redefine the point where an author's individuality becomes immersed in a transhistorical or even transhuman order of symbols and meanings. Fluidity also affects the boundaries between elitist, even secretive contexts of communication and the reception of such esotericism in popular fashions and far-flung vulgarizations. Visual studies are finally inviting us to rethink acts of switching between secular and religious registers, the transcultural interference between the various religious traditions, and the way in which exclusivist and culturally well-located traditions – such as Kabbalah – came to be treated as universally applicable codes. The present article will carry out a visual reading of a premodern text and follow its impact on the design of Jewish-Christian difference.

In the study of religions, visionary phenomena should not be misread as paranormal accounts; instead, they appear as a conventional device wherever ancient and medieval literatures express messages in iconic form.² Most studies of visions define and classify them by their otherworldly theological objects (which is not particularly satisfactory from

¹ See especially György Szönyi, "Pictura & Scriptura: New and Old Approaches to Image–Word Relations," *Symbolism* 8 (2008): 141–61; and "Political Iconography and the Emblematic Way of Seeing," in Colum Hourihane, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Medieval Iconography* (London: Routledge, 2017), 295–310. The present text is based on a lecture delivered at the workshop "From Humanities to Social Sciences: Visionary Experience in Cross-Disciplinary Perspective," which was held at the CEU Center for Religious Studies, Budapest, on July 5, 2017.

² Nancy van Deusen, ed., *Dreams and Visions: An Interdisciplinary Enquiry* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

an analytical point of view),³ while ancient historians have come to explore their political functions.⁴ It is no less important, in my view, to consider the vision as a rhetorical device. Through the manipulation of linguistic signs, an author may generate visions and a reader may replicate them. This technique of collapsing visionary into scriptural activity is at the core of one of the foundational texts of modern poetry, the two "Letters of the Seer" (*Lettres du voyant*) that Arthur Rimbaud wrote during the French revolutionary events of May 1871 to his friends. He defined poetry as an exercise in inventing a universal language by inducing visions through a disorder of the senses: "The poet transforms himself into a seer by an extensive, vast and systematic disorganization of his entire sense perception" (*"Le Poète se fait voyant par un long, immense et raisonné dérèglement de tous les sens"*).

Rimbaud keeps his promise. His sonnet on the color of the vowels is the most striking expression of this synesthetic evocation of visionary realities inherent in the texture of poetic language. In other poems, he produces visions artificially by textual intoxication, using a simple recipe: string together several sentences that all begin with the formula "I saw", and your reader will fall into rapture and ecstasy at least after the fifth turnaround. In the famous long poem "The Drunken Boat" of September 1871, a vision is produced by the succession of alexandrine quatrains starting repeatedly with "I have seen" (*j'ai vu* in French) and similar expressions, including "I have touched", which treat the envisioned world alternatively as an imagination and as a reality.⁵

A recurrent paratactic structure, translating a haunting sensorial memory into literary form, is thus a performative marker of the visionary narrative. This magical inebriation formula never fails, and the reason for its effectiveness has something to do with Judeo-Christian cultural memory. In the biblical Book of Ezekiel, the model of all visionary literature, five sentences that start with "I saw" (*wa'er'eh* in Hebrew) powerfully structure the heavenly throne vision of the first chapter. Eight similar cases occur in chapters 8 to 10. The syntactically induced vision does not need to have an otherworldly object for the

³ Howard R. Patch, *The Other World, According to Descriptions in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950); Colum Hourihane, ed., *Looking Beyond: Visions, Dreams and Insights in Medieval Art and History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University in association with Penn State University Press, 2010).

⁴ Gregor Weber, *Kaiser, Träume und Visionen in Prinzipat und Spätantike* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000); Juliette Harrisson, *Dreams and Dreaming in the Roman Empire: Cultural Memory and Imagination* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

⁵ Arthur Rimbaud, *The Drunken Boat: Selected Writings*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (New York: New York Review of Books, 2022).

recipe to function. The Book of Ecclesiastes delivers in its fourth chapter a profane version of the vision trope, as it insistently repeats the phrase "I saw" while enumerating miserable events of human life. In the New Testament Book of Revelation, chapters 19 to 21, the prophet successively builds 10 phrases that start with "I saw" (*eidon* in Greek), with it all being sealed in verse 22:8 with the conclusion, where the grammatical "I" reunites with the physical subject: "I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel."

Revelation and "The Drunken Boat" are proof of a paradoxical encounter between the visionary avant-garde and popular cultural consumption. Visions are not a privilege that nuns and hermits experience in their cells at cosmic moments: all 100 lines of "The Drunken Boat" are now inscribed on a wall at Rue Férou No. 4, near the restaurant where 17-year-old Rimbaud first recited them. The author's textual-sensorial technique is ready for mass consumption. A contemporary poet, who possesses an unrivalled capacity to mix highbrow literature with pop culture – I am speaking of Bob Dylan – crams "I saw" seven times into the second verse of "A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall", a song that he wrote in summer 1962 amid student protests against the nuclear arms race. From the staccato of the subjective "I saw", Dylan's chain of surrealistic apocalyptic metaphors finally switches to the objective chorus "and it's", concluding his prophetic vision by the prompt application of Ezekiel's trick.

THE VISIONS OF ALFONSO DE LA TORRE

These remarks on the literary simulation of visionary experience neatly fit one of the most successful works of popular science in the medieval Hispanic world, the *Delightful Vision* (*Visión deleytable*), written around 1440 by one Alfonso de la Torre, *bachiller* of arts. The author's personality is shrouded in mystery. According to a hypothetical biography, he hailed from the diocese of Burgos, studied theology in Salamanca, but left Castile at some moment during the authoritarian rule of Prime Minister Don Alvaro de Luna. On foreign soil, he became the confidant and protégé of Lord John of Beaumont (1419–1487), Prior of the Hospitaller order of St. John of Jerusalem in the Kingdom of Navarre, who commanded from him a work for the education of the crown prince, Charles of Viana (1421–1461). From this fact, one may presume that De la Torre settled at the Navarrese royal court in Olite, at the Aragonese court in Zaragoza, in the Kingdom of Naples, or successively in all three places.

His book addresses a lay elite that preferred to use the Romance vernacular even for purposes of scientific discourse.⁶ Surveying the disciplines and fields of knowledge in 58 chapters, the treatise presents itself as a dream that the author experienced while being fast asleep during one night⁷ – the sleeping visionary is visualized on a woodcut that accompanies the Toulouse incunabulum of 1489. In the first chapter, the dreamer develops “a vision that explains the evils and perturbations of the world poetically and by help of figures.” In the manner of “The Drunken Boat” and “A Hard Rain’s a-Gonna Fall”, the framework narrative combines a vision with an allegory and an imaginary travel account.⁸ The journey leads the narrator from lowlands covered in darkness and fog, which symbolize the rule of Opinion, through a steep path to the mountain where Truth resides. Ezekiel’s visionary rhetoric is abundantly pumped into the first chapter, where no less than 15 sentences starting with “I saw” (*vi* in Castilian) describe the miseries of knowledge, science, and universities at the author’s time. It is all wrapped up in the fifteenth “I saw”:



Alfonso de la Torre, *Comienza el tratado llamado vision deleytable de la filosofia*, Toulouse: Juan Parix of Heidelberg and Enrique Clebat, 1489.



Los Sueños de Don Francisco de Quevedo y La Vida del gran Tacaño enriquecida con lindas estampas, c. 1700.

Fig. 1 The Writer’s Dream Vision (1, 2)

⁶ On medieval genres of popular philosophy, see Marieke Abram, Steven Harvey, and Lukas Muehlethaler, eds., *The Popularization of Philosophy in Medieval Islam, Judaism, and Christianity* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2022).

⁷ Alfonso de la Torre, *Visión deleytable*, ed. Jorge García López, 2 vols. (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1991), 1:103.

⁸ Concepción Salinas Espinosa, “La *Visión deleytable* de Alfonso de la Torre y el viaje alegórico,” in María Isabel Toro Pascua, ed., *Actas del III Congreso de la Asociación Hispánica de Literatura Medieval* (Salamanca: Departamento de Literatura Española e Hispanoamericana, 1994), 911.

I saw the universal abomination of the world because science, which was once revered by all nations as a saintly thing and a divine oracle, had degraded into viciousness and become the origin of scandalous abuses and monstrous examples, worse than in any other time. Suddenly it seemed to me, when I had seen these abominations, as if one had lifted me up to the slope of a towering mountain, whose summit seemed to reach the lunar sphere and merge with it.⁹

A page that follows from here in the manuscripts was dropped from the Burgos edition of 1485, on which all premodern editions are based.¹⁰ The dream narrator hears a heavenly voice calling him to flee from Babylon: in the style of fifteenth-century Christian homiletics, this biblical order is telling the author to overcome spiritual confusion.¹¹ The manuscript version then describes how an infant boy, Understanding, encounters Natural Genius and becomes motivated by him to set off on a search for knowledge. On their adventurous journey, the two wanderers must first break the chains of their previous misguided beliefs; they must even kill a monster that blocks their way, before they can enter the foggy mountain region, where a foreign and incomprehensible language is spoken.

At this moment, Understanding's training starts. The common text of the manuscript and print versions completes the "I saw" series: "There, I saw a very honest young lady, who held in her right hand a speech scroll inscribed with Latin letters." The boy now studies Latin with this woman teacher, an allegory for Grammar. The latter is both a young virgin and a fertility idol, and she nourishes the boy with sweet milk from her breasts while disciplining him with a swatter that she wields in her left hand.¹² In a learning procedure that is, in the words of Emily Francomano, "highly physical and charged with sensorial information",¹³ the new adept is dispatched to other mountain towns, each of them under the control of a "landlady"¹⁴ who stands for one of the Seven Liberal Arts. The allegorical women give introductory presentations of the sciences that

⁹ De la Torre, *Visión deleytable*, 1:104–5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:105 (line 44) to 107 (line 22), which is missing from the Burgos edition, fol. A2r, onwards.

¹¹ The biblical sources (Isa 48:20; Jer 50:8, 28, 51:6; Rev 18:4) were reinterpreted allegorically, for example, by the French theologian Nicolas Poilevillain, also known as Nicolas de Clamanges (c.1363–1437); see Christopher M. Bellitto, *Nicolas de Clamanges: Spirituality, Personal Reform, and Pastoral Renewal on the Eve of the Reformations* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 78.

¹² De la Torre, *Visión deleytable*, 1:107–8.

¹³ Emily C. Francomano, *Wisdom and Her Lovers in Medieval and Early Modern Hispanic Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 49–53.

¹⁴ De la Torre, *Visión deleytable*, 1:116, "señora de aquella tierra."

they represent, outlining the *trivium* and *quadrivium* as they were commonly taught at medieval university arts faculties. Having visited five hostesses, the wanderers proceed to the “early paradise” ruled by a cheerful girl, Music.¹⁵ In the allegorical architecture of each mansion, Understanding sees the principles and founders of each town “orderly painted” on elaborate frescoes.¹⁶ These imaginary artworks may reflect the late medieval style of town hall paintings showing founder figures and political allegories.¹⁷

Understanding and Natural Genius finally arrive at the gate of the castle where Lady Truth reigns over the highlands of the sciences. Forming a board with her councilors Reason, Wisdom, and Nature, Queen Truth presides over an all-female “college of the heroic intellectual and moral virtues.” The ladies do not receive the wanderer easily, but submit him to a complicated admission procedure, in which the damsel Astrology serves as gatekeeper and go-between. The queen “would take counsel with the other sisters on whether this man should be allowed to enter. She ordered the damsel to return and retain him until he would be given a response.”¹⁸ Reason is sent to interrogate the visitor at the gate, until finally inviting him in. His hostesses lead him to their garden for a long conversation on physical and metaphysical matters, which continues in the houses of Wisdom, Nature, and Reason. Instead of wall paintings, the tour includes a performance of fantastic imaging technologies: Wisdom’s gems radiate portraits of moral philosophers, and Nature’s mirror screens a comprehensive overview of physics in a visionary orgy composed of no less than 154 “he saw” (*vido*) clauses. At a later stage of the conversation, Reason orders the four virtues to expose practical philosophy to Understanding; she then gives him a précis of politics partly in her own words and partly through a new look into Truth’s mirror, where Christian theology is likewise revealed in visionary form until the marvelous mirror, reaching the limits of human knowledge, turns black. Truth and Reason detail the final cause of human life – the vision of the Divine Glory – to Understanding, which praises the successful end of his journey and decides to move in with his hostesses.¹⁹

¹⁵ Ibid., 1:135.

¹⁶ Ibid., 1:114 (Grammar); see also 123 (Logic), 127 (Rhetoric), 131 (Arithmetic), 134 (Geometry), and 136 (Music).

¹⁷ I am referring, in particular, to the frescoes in the Palazzo Pubblico, Siena (1338–1339, Ambrogio Lorenzetti) and to those in the Palazzo della Ragione, Padua (1425–1440, Nicolò Miretto and Stefano da Ferrara).

¹⁸ De la Torre, *Visión delectable*, 1:137–38.

¹⁹ Ibid., 1:137 (Truth’s gate), 147 (Truth’s garden), 150 (Wisdom’s house and gems), 211 (Nature’s house), 236 (Nature’s mirror of physics), 245 (Nature’s garden), 249 (Reason’s house and garden), 294 (the

This narrative framework is not of Alfonso de la Torre's invention. In fact, he copies it from the didactic poem "Anticlaudianus" written by Alain de Lille in 1182–1183.²⁰ In De Lille's plot, the allegories of virtues and arts form a family of sisters in the house of Nature, which is depicted as a *locus amoenissimus* on a high mountain. The "new man" whom they have trained takes a carriage to the heavens, where the allegory of Theology and the Holy Virgin await his visit.²¹ Alfonso de la Torre's imitation manifestly performs a secular turn, since Nature's homestead is the goal rather than the start of the journey. Moreover, the feminized allegorical *personae* use a courtly outfit and ritual. Whereas the late antique heroine in Martianus Capella's didactic fable *On the Marriage of Philology and Mercury* is a middle-class matron with seven household slaves, Alain de Lille organizes the sciences as a prosperous nunnery, and De la Torre was possibly under the sway of more recent works such as the *Romance of the Rose* and the *City of Ladies* by Christine de Pizan, where female allegorical figures build sophisticated political congregations and hierarchies. De Pizan invents her city as an all-female community, whereas the *Delightful Vision* allows a male intruder to enter the women's realm after undergoing severe examinations. The text underscores the physical prettiness and attractive attire of Understanding's nannies and tutors, who teach him yet do not allow him any pretention to heterosexual favors. On the contrary, they aggressively invade his person. Before they admit him to their teaching, they order him to "please strip off these sordid, misshapen,



Fig. 2 The city of ladies (1, 2)

four virtues), 313 (Reason's discourse on politics), 323 (Truth's mirror of politics), 329 (Truth's mirror of theology), 331 (Reason's ultimate teaching), 348 (Understanding's decision to stay).

²⁰ James P. Wickersham Crawford, "The Seven Liberal Arts in the *Visión Delectable* of Alonso de la Torre," *Romanic Review* 4 (1913): 58–75; Gabriel González, "La *Visión delectable* de Alfonso de la Torre: Teoría de las artes liberales," *Cuadernos de ALDEEU* 4 (1988): 31–46.

²¹ Alain de Lille, "Anticlaudianus," *Patrologia latina* 210 (1855): col. 485–576; see col. 489–90 (*Domus Naturae*) and col. 524–30 (*Sphaerae Coeli*).

and outdated clothes, which are the manifold and diverse opinions";²² and indeed a woodcut in the Toulouse incunabulum shows the student standing humbly naked in front of his long-skirted mistress.

FIFTEENTH-CENTURY THOUGHT IN CONTEXT

To a reader of our time, the *Delightful Vision* may resemble Professor Snàporaz's painful reeducation by a feminist collective in Federico Fellini's 1979 movie *The City of Women*. To a medieval reader, however, the story must have conveyed a sense of liberation. Dream, vision, and female teaching provide a shortcut to knowledge, which is no more dependent on guidance by a university or church. De la Torre's eclectic concept of truth also claims to be located beyond confessional divisions, as Understanding affirms in the most frequently quoted sentence of the *Delightful Vision*: "I would very much like to be free from all sorts of imaginary opinions, and the truth said by a Christian will not move me more than that of a Jew or a Muslim or a Pagan, if all of them are truths."²³

The author followed this principle to the letter. A paramount De la Torre scholar, Luis M. Girón Negrón, summarizes extensive source research when he writes:

Disparate sources from the Greek, Islamic, Jewish, and Christian philosophical traditions are interwoven in De la Torre's exposition of his religious *Weltanschauung*. He learns logic from al-Ghazzali. His liberal arts curriculum is mostly drawn from St. Isidore. His philosophical ethics are from Aristotle, with a smattering of Aquinas and pseudo-Senecan materials. To prove the soul's immortality he resorts to Albertus Magnus. His philosophical theology follows Maimonides' *Guide* and references to Jewish Kabbalistic magic are discernible throughout.²⁴

In two classical articles from the early twentieth century, J. P. Wickersham Crawford detected the poem of Alain de Lille and Moses Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed* as De la Torre's most important sources,²⁵ two exactly contemporary texts from the 1180s

²² De la Torre, *Visión delectable*, 1:138–39, see likewise 116–17.

²³ *Ibid.*, 1:146.

²⁴ Luis M. Girón Negrón, *Alfonso de la Torre's Visión Delectable: Philosophical Rationalism and the Religious Imagination in Fifteenth Century Spain* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), xiii; Girón Negrón, "If There Were God: The Problem of Unbelief in the *Visión Delectable*," in Kevin Ingram, ed., *The Conversos and Moriscos in Late Medieval Spain and Beyond: Volume One* (Leiden, Brill: 2009), 85.

²⁵ James P. Wickersham Crawford, "The *Visión delectable* of Alonso de la Torre and Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed*," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 28, no. 2 (1913): 188–212.

that preceded Alfonso de la Torre by a quarter millennium. Ernst Robert Curtius pinpointed the *bachiller's* curiously untimely inspirations, which he attributed to the marginality of Spanish thought in comparison to the European mainstream: "An author who writes in 1440 and is published in 1480 can find readers in Spain (indeed on down into the seventeenth century), although he practically ignores all that European literature, science, and philosophy have produced since 1200."²⁶ This judgment has infuriated Hispanists, who have spent much effort to detect reflections of Thomism and Scotism in De la Torre's philosophy.²⁷

"Muysén de Egipto" is indeed the most recent name that appears on De la Torre's panorama of wise men,²⁸ but in his ideological convictions the author is doubtlessly a child of his time. The *Delightful Vision* defends astrology as the link between natural science and metaphysics; the author maintains that there are eternal logical and natural causes over which God has no power; he praises the "godly man" who rejects tradition, opinion, and custom in favor of reason; and he defines human perfection as the cognitive "conjunction" with the divine intellect. In his system, theology is part of political science, since it provides the religious unity that is important for government. The author is not prolific about Christian doctrine, which he has condensed into a single chapter at the end. In sum, the book represents a late medieval philosophical trend that since Ernest Renan has commonly been called "Averroism." Although Averroism faithfully reflects the distance that the Arab philosopher Ibn Rushd took with religious notions of creation, providence, the soul's immortality, and salvific faith, the late medieval revival of his thought was limited to Latin Christianity, where it was particularly influential in popular science and among the Jews.²⁹

²⁶ Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 543.

²⁷ Simina Farcasiu, "Social Purpose and Scholastic Method: The *Visión delectable* of Alfonso de la Torre," in Isaac Benabu, ed., *Circa 1492: Proceedings of the Jerusalem Colloquium "Litterae Judaearum in Terra Hispanica"* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1992), 79–97; Esther Gómez Sierra, "Una visión de la *Visión delectable*," in Aires A. Nascimento and Cristina Almeida Ribeiro, eds., *Actas do IV Congresso da Associação Hispânica de Literatura Medieval*, 3 vols. (Lisbon: Cosmos, 1993), 2:357–60.

²⁸ De la Torre, *Visión delectable*, 1:150.

²⁹ Rafael Ramón Guerrero, "La transmisión a Europa de Averroes," in Jorge Manuel Ayala Martínez, ed., *Averroes y los averroísmos* (Zaragoza: Sociedad de Filosofía Medieval, 1999), 103–28; Ahmed Chahlane, "Averroes, Maimónides, y la crisis en la comunidad judía medieval," *Anales del Seminario de Historia de la Filosofía* 22 (2005): 111–23; Basem Mahmud, "El averroísmo hebraico en los reinos cristianos desde el exilio hasta la expulsión del reino de Francia," *Revista Española de Filosofía Medieval* 23 (2016): 187–201.

Ever since the *Guide of the Perplexed* was detected as the *Delightful Vision's* main source, much ink has been spilled over the *bachiller's* religious background.³⁰ Marcel Bataillon and Américo Castro first explained his Maimonidean readings with the idea that he may have been a *converso*,³¹ a descendant of those Spanish Jews who were baptized *en masse* in 1391 and 1411–1413; this hypothesis was uncritically turned into a fact by many modern scholars. There is, in reality, no source about De la Torre's lineage, and the idea that Maimonides, inasmuch as he was a Jewish author, can only have appealed to Jewish readers is based on an extremely schematic view of religious difference. I.S. Révah already protested the inverted racism inherent in Castro's idea that Alfonso de la Torre, given his philosophical preferences, must have been a *converso* who popularized his group's critical mentality among Old Christians. This reasoning, Révah argues, is self-defeating, since it "absolutely invalidates the relation of dependence that one wants to establish between literary work and racial lineage."³²

As Girón Negrón admits, scholars now find themselves in a pickle, so to speak, on the issue of De la Torre's heritage. On the one hand, he is convinced that the *Delightful Vision*, with its "preference of Jewish over Christian natural philosophy", cannot have been authored by anyone but a *converso*; on the other hand, such reasoning, if explicitly formulated, would obviously lead to a "methodologically unsound", "essentialist", and "unwarranted reification of Jewish (and *converso*) religious sensibilities."³³ Recent publications, especially those of Michelle M. Hamilton, have nonetheless indulged this essentialist fallacy and combined it with a romantic idealization of Muslim Spain. Maimonides, even though he fled the religious persecution he faced in al-Andalus, is turned into the epitome of that society's alleged virtues; and De la Torre's act of quoting him in an Averroistic key, which might tell us something about intellectual curiosities in fifteenth-century Navarre, is on the contrary attributed to a Jewish atavism by which "Andalusi intellectual openness survived in Iberian fiction."³⁴ In a 2020 article on the framework

³⁰ Girón Negrón, *Alfonso de la Torre*, 19–22.

³¹ Marcel Bataillon, "La *Vision délicate* du bachelier Alonso de la Torre," *Annuaire du Collège de France* 51 (1951): 258–62; Américo Castro, *La realidad histórica de España* (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1954), 549–51.

³² I. S. Révah, *Leçon inaugurale faite le jeudi 8 décembre 1966, Collège de France, Chaire de langues et littératures de la péninsule ibérique et de l'Amérique latine* (Paris: Collège de France, 1967), 24.

³³ Girón Negrón, *Alfonso de la Torre*, 22.

³⁴ Michelle M. Hamilton, "Medieval Iberian Cultures in Contact: Iberian Cultural Production as Translation and Adaptation," in Javier Muñoz-Basols, Laura Lonsdale, and Manuel Delgado, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Iberian Studies* (London: Routledge, 2017), 57–8.

narrative of the allegorical vision, Hamilton keeps quiet about the *Delightful Vision's* borrowings from Alain de Lille but proclaims that the work expands "the earlier initiatory tale type of the Islamic and Jewish traditions."³⁵

While Maimonides is all about allegory, there are no female epistemological personifications;³⁶ and the predominance of this Latin tradition in Alfonso de la Torre seems to indicate that the latter's Maimonideanism was not part of a ghetto philosophy. The widespread tendency to assign the *Delightful Vision* to a niche of "converso literature"³⁷ stands in flagrant conflict with the only detail that we know for certain about the work's context. As the author points out at the end of his treatise, he wrote it at the behest of his lord, John of Beaumont, with whom he had held an intense personal conversation on philosophical topics. John of Beaumont had once asked him about man's final cause, and De la Torre responded by way of his current manuscript, which he intended to be so confidential that he did not want it to "come into a third hand."³⁸ According to a preliminary remark that can be found in some copies, a reference codex was kept and treasured at the royal court of Aragon.³⁹

Surprising as it may seem, Jews as well as New and Old Christians jointly cherished Maimonidean philosophy during the earlier part of the fifteenth century. Gómez Suárez de Figueroa, Lord of Feria, Zafra, and La Parra, sponsored a Spanish translation of the *Guide of the Perplexed* by one Pedro de Toledo, which is preserved in one manuscript.⁴⁰ Its editor, José Antonio Fernández López, considers that the Maimonides revival was not necessarily a subversive act of Judaizing: Christians read the Jewish philosopher from Cor-

³⁵ Michelle M. Hamilton, "El entendimiento con el qual me conosco": Intellectual Mysticism in the *Visión Delectable*, *Religions* 11, no. 5 (2020): 2–3.

³⁶ Francomano, *Wisdom and Her Lovers*, 51, 138.

³⁷ Michelle M. Hamilton, *Beyond Faith: Belief, Morality, and Memory in a Fifteenth-Century Judeo-Iberian Manuscript* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), xxxiii–xxxv, 135.

³⁸ De la Torre, *Visión delectable*, 1:101, 349–50. On the political career of his protector during those years, see Julia Pavon, "Juan de Beaumont, prior del Hospital: promoción al cargo y control de la Orden por parte de una facción nobiliaria en Navarra (1433–1451)," *Medievalismo* 25 (2015): 369–88.

³⁹ De la Torre, *Visión delectable*, 2:12.

⁴⁰ Luis M. Girón Negrón, "Pedro de Toledo's *Mostrador e enseñador de los turbados*: The Christian Reception of Maimonides' *Guide* in Fifteenth-Century Spain," in Josef Stern, James T. Robinson, and Yonatan Shemesh, eds., *Maimonides' "Guide of the Perplexed" in Translation: A History from the Thirteenth Century to the Twentieth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 141–80. Regarding the Jewish reception, see Maud Kozodoy, "No Perpetual Enemies: Maimonideanism at the Beginning of the Fifteenth Century," in James T. Robinson, ed., *The Cultures of Maimonideanism: New Approaches to the History of Jewish Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 149–70; and Ángel Sáenz-Badillos, "Late Medieval Jewish Writers on Maimonides," in Carlos Fraenkel, ed., *Traditions of Maimonideanism* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 223–44.

doba as a monotheist version of Seneca and as an exegete who seemed closer to patristic allegorical interpretation than to rabbinic legend and law.⁴¹

I would consider the book as a deliberately hybrid enterprise that consciously addressed a heterogeneous audience. Rationalist religion here resumes the integrative role that it had played during the earlier Middle Ages.⁴² Fifteenth-century Maimonideanism befit the era of Raymond of Sabunde's *Theologia naturalis* (1436); its reception was promoted by social forces that searched to transcend scholastic frameworks of learning. Aragon's ailing university at Huesca, which lagged behind its Castilian and Catalan rivals,⁴³ was no match for the syncretic and free-thinking intellectual culture that sprang up at the courts.

It is on this level that *conversos* must come into the picture. Zaragoza, the Aragonese capital, was a city with a recently converted Jewish elite around the De la Caballería (Ibn Labi) family, whose members held high positions in public finance both before and after their conversion. The jurist Pedro de la Caballería, Comptroller General of the kingdom, also served as the legal representative of the Muslims of Huesca and the Jews of the capital;⁴⁴ his son, Alfonso de la Caballería, would become the Vice-Chancellor of Aragon and a strong supporter of Columbus's voyage across the Atlantic. The Aragonese elite circles of the 1440s, which included staunch Christians and religiously indifferent individuals,⁴⁵ were not known for exhibiting the polemical thrust by which some first-generation Jewish converts of the previous generation, such as Profayt Duran, had reacted to their forced baptism.⁴⁶ Aragonese society – its court, cities, and elites, including

⁴¹ Maimónides, *Mostrador e enseñador de los turbados: Traducción cuatrocentista de Pedro de Toledo*, ed. José Antonio Fernández López (Zaragoza: Riopiedras Ediciones, 2016), 19–20.

⁴² Sarah Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World: Portrait of a Mediterranean Thinker* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 14; Carlos Fraenkel, *Philosophical Religions from Plato to Spinoza: Reason, Religion, and Autonomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁴³ Hastings Rashdall, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895), 1:93; Pablo Cuevas Subías, ed., *La Universidad de Huesca (1354–1845): Quinientos años de historia* (Zaragoza: University of Zaragoza Press, 2020).

⁴⁴ Susana Lozano Gracia, *Las élites de la ciudad de Zaragoza a mediados del siglo XV: la aplicación del método prosopográfico en el estudio de la sociedad* (Zaragoza: University of Zaragoza Press, 2007), 937, 1500. The jurist is probably not identical with the homonymous but ecclesiastical author of an anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim work; see Cándida Ferrero Hernández and Nuria Gómez Llauger, "Polémica y razón cristiana en el *Zelus Christi* de Pedro de la Cavallería," *Iberia Judaica* 5 (2013): 200.

⁴⁵ Regarding Pedro de la Caballería, see Yitzchak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961), 2:276–77.

⁴⁶ Maud Kozodoy, *The Secret Faith of Maestre Honoratus: Profayt Duran and Jewish Identity in Late Medieval Iberia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

the *converso* administrators and intellectuals – was at the time bent on a new imperial policy that animated the kingdom's rise as a Mediterranean thalassocracy.⁴⁷

Claiming a night vision rather than university scholarship as his source, De la Torre proposed a unified philosophical worldview that was inclusive precisely because it was part of a policy of proselytization.⁴⁸ The *Delightful Vision* appeared at a moment in which the religious difference of most Aragonese Jewish communities had been erased through an act of theological and political pressure. Far from being the expression of minority resistance, the *Visión deleytable* unfolds a rigidly hierarchical view of cosmic and political order.⁴⁹ The author deems it necessary that society be organized in classes, that men rule over women, and that humans of temperate climes enslave fellow humans elsewhere.⁵⁰

The *Delightful Vision's* ideology is couched in a language of gender. Its image of women is certainly not detached from the fifteenth-century profusion of anti- and pro-feminist writing⁵¹ and the courtly ritual that placed women at its center. The 1446 travel journal of Sebastian IIsung, Patrician of Augsburg, sheds some light on the customs of the Navarrese court in De la Torre's time. The *bachiller's* maecenas Prince Charles, his German-born wife Agnes of Cleves (1422–1448), and the duke Gaston of Foix were all young people in their early 20s who spent their time hunting and banqueting.⁵² IIsung was shown the splendid palace of Olite and introduced to the queen, who enjoyed the fresh air under a canopy with her maids. After IIsung had kneeled before her according to the local etiquette, Foix asked him to revere the ladies with a German-style embrace and kiss. The performance left everyone embarrassed yet with a feeling of having satisfied the queen's needs for ceremonial respect.⁵³

⁴⁷ Flocel Sabaté, *The Crown of Aragon: A Singular Mediterranean Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

⁴⁸ I use the term coined by Francisca Vendrell de Millás, "La política proselitista del rey Don Fernando I de Aragón," *Sefarad* 10 (1950): 349–55.

⁴⁹ Franz Lebsanft, "Imagination und spirituelle Erziehung im spätmittelalterlichen Spanien: Alfonso de la Torres *Visión Deleytable*," in Rudolf Behrens, ed., *Ordnungen des Imaginären: Theorien des Imaginären in funktionsgeschichtlicher Sicht* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2002), 24.

⁵⁰ De la Torre, *Visión deleytable*, 1:322, 323, 325, referring to Aristotle's doctrine of natural slavery (*Politics* I, 1252b9).

⁵¹ On the *querelle des femmes* of the 1440s, see Robert Archer, *The Problem of Woman in Late-Medieval Hispanic Literature* (Rochester, NY: Tamesis, 2005).

⁵² José María Lacarra, *Historia política del Reino de Navarra: desde sus orígenes hasta su incorporación a Castilla*, 3 vols. (Pamplona: Caja de Ahorros de Navarra / Editorial Aranzadi, 1971), 3:245–49.

⁵³ Volker Honemann, "Sebastian IIsung als Spanienreisender und Santiagopilger (mit Textedition)," in Klaus Hebers, ed., *Deutsche Jakobspilger und ihre Berichte* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1988), 87; Spanish

The allegorical counterpiece to women-centered court ritual also marked trans-cultural identity. Ezekiel sees a male god's throne, and Maimonides visits an allegorical male sovereign in his palace,⁵⁴ but John of Patmos and Boethius produce female visions, which De la Torre fervently reenacts. His dreamed-up city of ladies was as distinct as could be from the Muslim and Jewish uses of allegory, where the models of muses, duchesses, nuns, and the Holy Virgin had little direct or indirect impact. The allegories and metaphysical personifications of ancient and medieval Jewish speculation represent images of a universal mother (such as biblical Wisdom), a monogamous wife (as the four feminine *sefirot*), and a scheming and demonized handmaid (as the Mishnah in the Zohar).⁵⁵ Jewish adaptations of De la Torre's visions usually translated them into a conventionally sexualized notion of femininity. From the first line, Leone Ebreo's philosophical talk between Filone and Sofia would associate epistemological woman not with the thirst for knowledge but with heterosexual "love and desire."⁵⁶ It would take several centuries for Hebrew literature to welcome the virgin teachers that populate Latin allegorical language.⁵⁷

TWO LINES OF TRANSMISSION

Alfonso de la Torre's Maimonideanism proposed a vision for a composite mainstream, but a peculiar strand of reception occasionally revived its sources' Jewish alterity. In all its four phases of circulation, the *Delightful Vision* attracted a two-tiered audience. Some members could pigeonhole the book as Christian and some as Jewish by having recourse to certain editorial measures.

Regarding the first phase, the early handwritten distribution, García López's critical edition lists seventeen manuscripts in either Castilian, Aragonese, or Catalan.⁵⁸ An eigh-

translation in Juan Iturralde y Suit, "Manuscrito curioso del siglo XV," in *El Palacio Real de Olite: estudio histórico-artístico* (Pamplona: G. Enciso, 1922), 50–2.

⁵⁴ Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, III, 51.

⁵⁵ *Zohar* 1.27b; *Le Zohar*, trans. Charles Mopsik (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1981), t. I, 157–58; Pinchas Giller, "Love and Upheaval in the Zohar's *Sabba de-Mishpatim*," *Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 7, no. 1 (1997): 31–60.

⁵⁶ Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'amore* (Rome: Laterza, 2008), 7.

⁵⁷ Carsten L. Wilke, "The Soul Is a Foreign Woman: Otherness and Psychological Allegory in Biblical Exegesis from the Zohar to Hasidism," in Baruch J. Schwartz, Abraham Melamed, and Aharon Shemesh, eds., *Iggud: Selected Essays in Jewish Studies. Vol. I: The Bible and Its World, Rabbinic Literature and Jewish Law, and Jewish Thought* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 2008), 129–39.

⁵⁸ De la Torre, *Visión deleytable*, 1:13–28.

teenth manuscript exists in a transliteration of the Aragonese version into the Hebrew alphabet. Dated to 1468, the latter document is proof of an independent Jewish line of transmission.⁵⁹



Toulouse, 1489
Christian

Ferrara, 1554
Jewish

Venice, 1621
Christian

Frankfurt [i.e. Amsterdam]
1623. Jewish

Fig. 3 Editions of the *Delightful Vision* (1–4)

From the second phase, Renaissance printing, eight editions are extant. Four are incunabula produced by Christians (Barcelona 1484 in Catalan; Burgos 1485 in Castilian, reprinted Toulouse 1489, 1494); three come from Flemish printers in Seville (1526, 1528, 1538), and one is the work of a Jewish printing shop in Ferrara (1554). The latter edition, however, seems to have targeted a mixed audience, since Jorge Manrique's piously Christian *coplas* are added as an appendix.⁶⁰

In the third phase, the age of confessionalization, at least seven Christian editions are followed by two Jewish ones. Shortly after the Ferrara edition, the *Delightful Vision* became the object of an Italian counterfeit translation that was printed in Venice repeatedly under the title *Sommario di tutte le scientie*, stating as author a local nobleman, Domenico Delfino (1556, 1565, 1566, 1568, 1584, 1585, 1621). This editorial endeavor should not be judged by modern standards of plagiarism; it was presumably a means of circumventing Counter-Reformation censorship. Pseudo-Delfino's text had a singular fortune in the seventeenth century. A Portuguese Jew in Amsterdam, Francisco (Joseph) de Cáceres, produced a Spanish retranslation that was printed twice (1623, 1663). He based himself on Delfino's text alongside the Spanish original. In the interest of his Jewish readers, Cáceres dropped the chapter devoted to Christian theology, which was still included

⁵⁹ James W. Nelson Novoa, "Ms. Parma Pal. 2666 as a Document of Sephardi Literary and Philosophical Expression in Fifteenth-Century Spain," *European Judaism* 43, no. 2 (2010): 20–36.

⁶⁰ Herman Prins Salomon, *Deux études portugaises / Two Portuguese Studies* (Braga: Barbosa & Xavier, 1991), 57.

in the Ferrara edition. The author of this de-Christianized text was seen by the Spanish Inquisition as being “very much a Jew”, and the *Delightful Vision* was consequently repressed starting in 1652. However, only the 1663 re-edition clearly displayed a Jewish profile by adding as an appendix the rabbinic count of the 613 commandments.⁶¹

The fourth phase, the age of modern criticism, follows a period in which the emblematic way of visualizing abstract knowledge appeared outdated. George Ticknor characterized in 1849 the *Delightful Vision* as an erudite and sagacious work that is spoiled by its tasteless allegorical framework: “[I]t is awkward and uninteresting in the general structure of its fiction, and meagre in its style and illustrations. This, however, did not prevent it from being much read and admired.”⁶² In 1855, Adolfo de Castro produced a mediocre re-edition of the book in the canonic series of Spanish classics, relegated into a volume titled *Bibliographical Curiosities*.⁶³ In the twentieth century, the status of the work as a Maimonidean manual sparked the interest of various Jewish Studies scholars, so that its double reception continues to this day.

As the printers’ tactics seem to indicate, the genre of visionary allegory navigated prudently across Counter-Reformation frontlines. Visions, too, needed to conform to confessional ways of seeing: while Protestant visionaries perceived the Virgin Sophia,⁶⁴ Catholics were comforted by the Virgin Mary and her angels. A conscious counter-model to the *Delightful Vision* can be discovered in a biblical meditation by the Dominican Juan de Clavería (1581–1651), who exacerbates confessional symbolism under the title *Saint Thomas and His Theology in Betsalel, the Tabernacle, and the Heavenly Woman of Revelation* (1638). This Catholic visionary gives not Truth or Nature, but neo-Thomist dogmatics the dignity of “the queen among the doctrines.”⁶⁵ By comparing Thomism to John

⁶¹ De la Torre, *Visión delectable*, 1:33–4; Isabel Muñoz Jiménez, “La versión de la *Visión delectable* hecha por Francisco de Cáceres,” in Fernando Díaz Esteban, ed., *Los judaizantes en Europa y la Literatura castellana del Siglo de Oro* (Madrid: Letrúmero, 1994), 303–12; Harm den Boer, “The *Visión Delectable* under the Scrutiny of the Spanish Inquisition: New Insights on Converso Literature,” *European Judaism* 43, no. 2 (2010): 4–19; Miguel A. Granada, “La *Visión delectable* de Alfonso de la Torre a Francisco de Cáceres: La eliminación de la ambigüedad,” *eHumanista/Conversos* 6 (2018): 346–62.

⁶² George Ticknor, *History of Spanish Literature*, 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1849), 1:381.

⁶³ Alfonso de la Torre, “Visión delectable de la Filosofía y Artes liberales,” in Adolfo de Castro, ed., *Biblioteca de autores españoles, vol. 36. Curiosidades bibliográficas: Colección escogida de obras raras de amenidad y erudición* (Madrid: Rivadeneyra, 1855), 339–402.

⁶⁴ Desiree Hirst, *Hidden Riches: Traditional Symbolism from the Renaissance to Blake* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964), 91–5.

⁶⁵ Juan de Clavería, *Santo Tomas y su Teología en Beseleel y el Tabernaculo y en la Celestial muger del Apocalypsis* (Zaragoza: En el Hospital real, 1638), dedication.

of Patmos's vision of a sun-clothed woman in chapter 12 of Revelation, De Clavería endows his science with a feminine sex appeal: "This woman seems to be the image of the theology of Saint Thomas. It is a most beautiful woman, and she is so extraordinarily pretty that she greatly enflames with love all those who study her." The planetary symbolism of the New Testament source allows the placing of the allegory between male fantasy and a vision of the cosmos: "The doctrine of the Holy Fathers is the sun, and the doctrine of the pagan philosophers is the moon."⁶⁶ The allegory of science thus espouses most of the visionary program by which baroque painters distinguished the Immaculate Conception.⁶⁷

CROSS-CONFESSIONAL VISIONS

The search for a confessional visionary language extended to the Spanish theater scene when stagecraft allowed visions and angels to appear in the flesh. The performing actors were normally tied to a rope and lowered from a balcony; but sophisticated techniques in the Coliseo playhouse of Madrid allowed even horizontal and oblique movements. Corpus Christi performances were famous for their special effects, since their playbooks abounded with allegories and apparitions;⁶⁸ but mythological comedies also had their charming potential. In Francisco de Rojas Zorrilla's play *The Enchantments of Medea*, an entire ship hovered through the air, with the actress standing in it topless.⁶⁹ Like witch-themed plays, baroque allegorical visions could offer a neutral territory for entertainment and a convenient pretext for erotic imagery.⁷⁰

Seventeenth-century prose includes a profusion of works that revive visionary dream figures from the Middle Ages.⁷¹ The *Truth-Discovering Dreams and Discourses* of the Spanish satirist Francisco de Quevedo stuck, across religious boundaries, with German

⁶⁶ Ibid., 377.

⁶⁷ See the painting by Diego Velázquez (c.1618) in The National Gallery, London.

⁶⁸ Catalina Buezo, "La función del ángel en la puesta en escena del auto sacramental calderoniano," *Archivum Calderonianum* 10 (2003): 31.

⁶⁹ M. Teresa Julio, "Tramoyas y artificios en *Los Encantos de Medea*," in Felipe B. Pedraza Jiménez, Rafael González Cañal, and Gemma Gómez Rubio, eds., *Espacio, tiempo y género en la comedia española: II Jornadas de teatro clásico de Toledo* ([Cuenca: Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 2015), 203–4.

⁷⁰ Farkas Gábor Kiss, *Imagináció és imitáció Zrínyi eposzában* (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2012), 178, writes pointedly: "A szenzualitást és erotikát még nem lehetett kendőzetlenül a 17. századi olvasók elé tárni: a legfontosabb eszköz elfogadtatásukra az allegória."

⁷¹ Peer Schmidt and Gregor Weber, eds., *Traum und res publica: Traumkulturen und Deutungen sozialer Wirklichkeiten im Europa von Renaissance und Barock* (Berlin: Akademie, 2008).

Protestants such as Johann Michael Moscherosch.⁷² The penetration of feminine allegories into the Hebrew texts of mainstream Judaism is a slower but no less fascinating development. As mentioned above, the closest equivalent to the Liberal Arts allegory in Jewish symbolism is the depiction of the Mishnah, the rabbinic code, in the Zohar as an undignified handmaid of the Torah. Joseph Caro (1488–1575), a major rabbinical authority in Safed, left behind a kabbalistic dream diary, in which he experienced the Mishnah as his “Maggid”, a personal guide or demon capable of changing gender, so that Caro could imagine her as a mysterious woman and have a passionate “embrace” with her.⁷³

The allegorical vision trope made its entrance into Renaissance Judaism through an uncommon Hebrew book, *The Valley of Vision*, which the Italian physician and kabbalist Abraham Yagel (1553–c.1624) published in 1578. He narrates there how he saw his father in a dream and how both, not unlike Dante and Virgil in the *Divine Comedy*, toured an allegorical heaven where they met three sisters: philosophical, natural, and divine science. The three ladies expose their knowledge to the two men in just the same way Reason, Wisdom, and Nature instruct Understanding and Natural Genius in the *Delightful Vision*. When further allegories of the sciences and virtues soon join the dream conversation, it becomes clear, for example, that the scene of Grammar’s breastfeeding has traveled all the way from Alain de Lille⁷⁴ via Alfonso de la Torre to this Jewish scholar. The latter, however, still recognizes this form of expression as non-Jewish and outlandish. He explains to his reader that “these women appear as allegories in the manner in which the ancient gentile writers often used them rhetorically in their poems”,⁷⁵ and he admits that his personnel are out of step with the tasks that women should assume in reality: “Only in an ideal world are women treated as celestial princesses, as oracles of divine wisdom clothed in radiant splendor. In the real world, women have a different function: to serve faithfully and diligently the men.”⁷⁶

⁷² Johann Michael Moscherosch, *Visiones de Don Quevedo: Wunderliche und Warhafftige Gesichte Philanders von Sittewald* (Strasbourg: Johan Philip Mülben, 1642).

⁷³ Hirsch Loeb Gordon, *The Maggid of Caro: The Mystic Life of the Eminent Codifier Joseph Caro as Revealed in His Secret Diary* (New York: Pardes, 1949); R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, *Joseph Caro, Lawyer and Mystic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 111–14; Moshe Idel, “Some Concepts of Mishnah among Sixteenth-Century Safedian Kabbalists,” in Piet van Boxel, Kirsten MacFarlane, and Joanna Weinberg, eds., *The Mishnaic Moment: Jewish Law among Jews and Christians in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 80–1.

⁷⁴ De Lille, “Anticlaudianus,” col. 506.

⁷⁵ David B. Ruderman, *A Valley of Vision: The Heavenly Journey of Abraham Ben Hananiah Yagel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 54, 272.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 18, 64.

The *Delightful Vision* had more enthusiastic imitators among some crypto-Jewish writers of the seventeenth century, whom the allegories helped cross cultural boundaries. Son of a New Christian father and an Old Christian mother, the Spanish baroque poet Antonio Enríquez Gómez (c.1600–1663) experienced a situation of religious ambiguity that made Alfonso de la Torre's rationalism particularly delightful to him. While living among the secret Jews of France in the 1640s, he published satirical novels and wrote clandestine manuscript works; but when he returned to Spain in the 1650s, he staged comedies of saints of impeccable Catholic orthodoxy. In his published work, not only do the biblical, classical, and scholastic intellectual worlds provide an arsenal of metaphysical concepts that allow him to avoid confessional theology, but Enríquez Gómez also cherishes the narrative framework of a visionary encounter with allegorical figures, normally approaching the genre under the influence of Quevedo's satirical dream prose.

Enríquez Gómez's earlier works of poetry, such as the verse novel *The First Pilgrim's Sin* (*La culpa del primero peregrino*) of 1644, displays hosts of feminine allegories representing virtues, vices, sciences, and countries.⁷⁷ Quite originally, the poet eroticizes the allegorical ladies; they abandon their roles as guides and become objects of emphatic courting. Truth, Science, Reason, Theology, Humility, Nature, Justice, Honor, Chivalry – all of them become “brides”, “beloved”, or “wives” of the male subject, provided the latter does not prefer lecherous relationships with Opinion, Pride, Tyranny, Impiety, and other malicious “concubines.”⁷⁸

In the starting verses of his satirical novel *The Pythagorean World* (*El Siglo pitagórico*), the author, like Rimbaud, claims a fundamental coherence between vision and poetry: “I had a vision without being a prophet, and I need to tell it since I am a poet.” His allegorical novel *The Tower of Babylon* (*La Torre de Babilonia*), which is told as one winter night's dream in a mixture of allegory and satire, guides the subject through visions on a second level, allegorical performances, and even theatrical functions that show sea battles and fleet landings with no less realism than modern films. In one of the novel's dream chapters, the narrator wakes up naked in the Spanish countryside. Passing in a

⁷⁷ Carsten L. Wilke, “Losing Spain, Securing Zion: Allegory and Mental Adaption to Exile among Refugees of the Iberian Inquisitions,” in John Tolan, ed., *Expulsion and Diaspora Formation: Religious and Ethnic Identities in Flux from Antiquity to the Seventeenth Century* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 117–34.

⁷⁸ For examples of allegorical spouses, see Antonio Enríquez Gómez, *Academias morales de las Musas* (Bordeaux: Pierre de la Court, 1642), 69, 258, 267, 372, 380; Gómez, *El Siglo Pitagórico y vida de Don Gregorio Guadaña*, ed. Charles Amiel (Paris: Ediciones iberoamericanas, 1977), 206; Gómez, *La Torre de Babilonia: Primera parte* (Rouen: Laurens Maurry, 1649), 228; for allegorical concubines, see Gómez, *Academias morales*, 378; and Gómez, *El Siglo Pitagórico*, 164.

carriage, two young ladies make sexist comments about his body, one of them joking: "My flesh is still trembling from having seen such visions in the 'waking vision' mode."⁷⁹ By describing a woman and a man who envision one another, the author ironizes his own visionary genre, as well as Augustine's distinction between ordinary dream visions and "waking visions" reserved for the saints.⁸⁰

A Jewish type of the confessionalized vision takes place at least once, when Enríquez Gómez praises a Spanish Judaizer burned in 1644 by the Inquisition in a clandestine poem entitled "On the Most Blissful Demise of Judah the Believer" (*"Al felicísimo tránsito de Judá el Creyente"*). The poet imparts to the martyr a vision of the allegory of "the Law" (the Torah), which fulfills all the functions of the saintly visions in Catholic prose and theater. When Lope de Vega, in particular, glorified the martyrs of contemporary Japan on the Madrid stage, his text likewise previews that the torment would be dramatically enhanced by much visionary acrobatics played out in the air above the stage.⁸¹ There is an exception, though, for the vision that ecstasizes Enríquez Gómez's Jewish martyr. The poet seems to describe the Law's allegorical body as that of a nude woman,⁸² which is undoubtedly a breach with Marian iconography, but joins contemporary iconographies of philosophical allegories representing Truth, Nature, and even Wisdom in their most simple apparel.⁸³

As it can be concluded from Enríquez Gómez's allegories, the *Delightful Vision's* imagery appealed to early modern "converso literature" because it allowed readers and listeners to subtly blur or affirm confessional identity in accordance with the multiple femininities of these dream figures. When more traditional Jewish coreligionists came across Alfonso de la Torre's city of ladies, their reaction was often more passionate. Most notably, a Jewish preacher and scholar in Constantinople named Abraham Yakhini (1617–1682) kept a dream diary that proves how much these visualizations of intellectual life appealed to male sexual fantasies. Caro's Mishnah and other feminine personifications

⁷⁹ Enríquez Gómez, *La Torre de Babilonia*, 78–81, 178: "temblando estan las [carnes] mias de auer visto en Vision Diurna semejantes Visiones."

⁸⁰ Jesse Keskiaho, *Dreams and Visions in the Early Middle Ages: The Reception and Use of Patristic Ideas, 400–900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 190.

⁸¹ Lope de Vega, "Los primeros mártires del Japón," in de Vega, *Obras*, Vol. XII / Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, no. 187 (Madrid: Atlas, 1965), 345–46.

⁸² I. S. Révah, *Antonio Enríquez Gómez, un écrivain marrane (v. 1600–1663)*, ed. Carsten L. Wilke (Paris: Éditions Chandeigne, 2003), 352–55.

⁸³ Marie-Thérèse d'Alverny, *Études sur le symbolisme de la Sagesse et sur l'iconographie*, ed. Charles Burnett (Aldershot, UK: Variorum, 1993), 210–12.

of the Jewish scriptures loom in the background when Yakhini dreams that his sacred texts awake to life and rebuke him vividly in the guise of an old teacher. In the dreaming rabbi's eyes, the old man changes into a beautiful young girl, whom Yakhini seizes and kisses with passion: "I then arose in great fear, my hair standing on end, trembling and weeping over this great vision."

In another nightmare that Yakhini noted in 1652, an aggressive camel runs after him. He flees into his house and locks himself in, but the camel bangs at the door from outside and soon busts it open. Running through his house in anguish, the rabbi is trapped in the inner room, but there, all of a sudden, he finds himself standing on a lonely beach. A young girl walks toward him, embraces, and kisses him. She announces that a marriage with a sublime queen will be arranged for him in the future. This noble wife, she adds, is still hidden behind the moon, which is in turn covered behind the sun. He swears that he will not forget her promise, and the girl is so glad about his agreement that she consents to have sex with him on the spot. At this moment, another girl comes to herald that his queen/bride is about to arrive. The sun appears in great splendor, then the moon, and finally his bride in between the two heavenly bodies. And then "from fear and terror, I awoke."

Gershom Scholem concluded that "these dreams are characteristic of the seduction with which the sexual instinct in man accosts those who want to sanctify themselves. The dreamer's fear and trembling at the sight of the Torah changing into a maiden, and at the confusion of the spheres of holiness and sensuality are understandable enough."⁸⁴ One may also suspect a distant echo of the allegorical stories from Christian sources, which have gone through a reception process in which fantasies of brides, wives, and chambermaids have altered the form and meaning of these medieval didactic images.

CONCLUSION

The *Delightful Vision* uses visionary *topoi* to imagine a new style of scholarship: vernacular instead of Latin, courtly instead of academic, and metaphysical instead of theological, creating a vague Greek-Roman-Jewish-Islamic-Christian synthesis instead of a clearly defined religious ideology. What sets De la Torre's book apart is not only its philosophy, but also its gendered emblematic pattern, which it imports from late antique *paideia*, arts faculty teaching, and courtly love traditions. Science appears as a passionate encounter with a cluster of feminine allegorical figures who form nothing short of a

⁸⁴ Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai evi: The Mystical Messiah, 1626–1676* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), 168.

women's society, a city of ladies. This parallel feminine republic includes a complex diversification of social categories, involving mature matrons and young virgins, mistresses and wet nurses, distant apparitions and accessible helpers, which transcend the canonic social functions of women as mother, maid, nanny, lover, and bride. These women detain authority, even salvific power, but they appear infinitely subservient to the poetic subject's intellectual and existential needs.

As I have tried to show, György Szönyi's insights into Renaissance medievalism and the figurative-symbolic ambiguity of its visual codes can open a new approach to the peculiar philosophical program of the *Delightful Vision*. To be sure, the hierarchical mountainscape governed by the supreme ladies reflects the conventional order of the academic disciplines, but whereas Alain de Lille distinguishes between the Seven Liberal Arts and theology, Alfonso de la Torre replaces the latter almost entirely with metaphysics, practical philosophy, and politics. Highlighting his allegories' physical attractiveness, De la Torre starts eroticizing them to some extent: the text's seventeenth-century reception will enhance these features and redefine the interaction between teaching and understanding. The transformation of the allegories reflects the rise of new arts and institutions of popular entertainment, the impact of profane and non-hierarchical models of practical reason, but also a double reception among Christians and Jews with their respective views of femininity. Transporting the project of an ecstatic science, a hybrid and visualized mode of philosophical expression continued inviting the cross-confessional strategies for which it had been conceived at the outset.