The English Majors Association presents

Poems on Dreams and Dreaming.

I know 'tis but a Dream, yet feel more anguish
Than if 'twere Truth. It has been often so:
Must I die under it? Is no one near?
Will no one hear these stifled groans and wake me?

*Samuel Taylor Coleridge*

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**The Dream of a Lover**

*Anonymous Late Medieval Lyric*

Benedicite! whate dreamed I this nyght?
Methought the worlde was turmyd up so downe
The sun, the moone had lost their force and lyght,
The sea also drowned both toure and towne.
Yet more marvel how that I heard the sounde
Of onys voice saying: beare in thy mynd,
Thi lady hath forgotten to be kynd.

**In a goodly nyght, as yn my bede I laye**

*Anonymous Late Medieval Lyric*

In a goodly nyght, as yn my bede I laye
pleasentlye slepyng, thys dreme I hade:
to me ther came a creature bryghter þen þe day,
whyche comfortyd my sprytes þat were a-fore full sadde,
To beholde hur person, God knowys my hart was glade,
for hur swete vysage lyke Venus gold ytt shone;
to speke to hur I was ryght sore aferde,—d
but when I waked ther was I alone.

Then when she sawe þat I lay soo stylly,
full softely she drew vnto my beddes syde;
she bade me shewe hur what was my wyll
& my request ytt shuld not be denied.
With þat she kyst me, but & I shulde haue be dede,
I cowde not speke my sprytes were soo ferre gone;
for verrely shame my face a-wey I wryede,—
but when I a-woke ther was but I alone.

Then speke I, goodly woordes to hur said:
‘I beseche your noblenes on me to have some grace.

To aproche to your presence I was sumwhat aferde;
þat causys me now to turne aweye my face.’
‘Nay, sir,’ quod she ‘as towchyng thys case,
I perdone yow, my owne dere harte, anon.’
With þat I toke hur softely, & swetly dyd hur basse,—
but when I awoke ther was but I alone.

Then said she to me, ‘O my dere harte,
may I content yn any wyse your mynde?’
‘Ye, God knowys,’ said I, ‘through louys darte
my harte for-euer to haue ye do me bynde.
Yow be my comforth; I haue you most yn mynde;
haue on me petye & lett me not þis mone.’
‘Leve’, said she, ‘þis mournyng; I wyll not be vnkynd.’
But when I a-woke ther was but I alone.

I prayed hur hartely þat she wolde come to bede;
she said she was content to doo me pleasure.
I know not wheder I was alyve or dede
so glad I was to haue þat goodly treasure.
I kyssed hur, I bassed hur, owt of all mesure;
the more I kyssyde hur, þe more hur bewty shone.
To serue hur, to please hur, þat tyme I dyd me deuer;—
but when I a-woke ther was but I alone.

Suche goodly sportes all nygt endured I
vnto þe morow þat day cam to sprynge.
Soo glade I was of my dreme, verely,
that in my slepe londe I be-gane to synge.
And when I a-woke, by Hevyn Kynge,
I wete after hur, & she was gone:
I had no-thyng but my pylowe yn my armys lyng,—
For when I a-woke ther was but I alone.
Sonnet 43
William Shakespeare

When most I wink, then do mine eyes best see,
For all the day they view things unrespected;
But when I sleep, in dreams they look on thee,
And darkly bright, are bright in dark directed.
Then thou, whose shadow shadows doth make bright,
How would thy shadow's form form happy show
To the clear day with thy much clearer light,
When to unseeing eyes thy shade shines so!
How would, I say, mine eyes be blessed made
By looking on thee in the living day,
When in dead night thy fair imperfect shade
Through heavy sleep on sightless eyes doth stay!
All days are nights to see till I see thee,
And nights bright days when dreams do show thee me.

The Dream
John Donne

Dear love, for nothing less than thee
Would I have broke this happy dream;
It was a theme
For reason, much too strong for fantasy,
Therefore thou wak'dst me wisely; yet
My dream thou brok'st not, but continued'st it.
Thou art so true that thoughts of thee suffice
To make dreams truths, and fables histories;
Enter these arms, for since thou thought'st it best,
Not to dream all my dream, let's act the rest.

As lightning, or a taper's light,
Thine eyes, and not thy noise wak'd me;
Yet I thought thee
(For thou lov'st truth) an angel, at first sight;
But when I saw thou sawest my heart,
And knew'st my thoughts, beyond an angel's art,
When thou knew'st what I dreamt, when thou knew'st when

Excess of joy would wake me, and cam'st then,
I must confess, it could not choose but be
Profane, to think thee any thing but thee.

Coming and staying show'd thee, thee,
But rising makes me doubt, that now

Thou art not thou.
That love is weak where fear's as strong as he;
'Tis not all spirit, pure and brave,
If mixture it of fear, shame, honour have;
Perchance as torches, which must ready be,
Men light and put out, so thou deal'st with me;
Thou cam'st to kindle, goest to come; then I
Will dream that hope again, but else would die.

A Dream
William Blake

Once a dream did weave a shade
O'er my angel-guarded bed,
That an emmet lost its way
Where on grass methought I lay.

Troubled, wildered, and forlorn,
Dark, benighted, travel-worn,
Over many a tangle spray,
All heart-broke, I heard her say:

'O my children! do they cry,
Do they hear their father sigh?
Now they look abroad to see,
Now return and weep for me.'
Pitying, I dropped a tear:
But I saw a glow-worm near,
Who replied, 'What wailing wight
Calls the watchman of the night?'
'I am set to light the ground,
While the beetle goes his round:
Follow now the beetle's hum;
Little wanderer, hie thee home!'
In a night, or in a day,
In a vision, or in none,
Is it therefore the less gone?
All that we see or seem
Is but a dream within a dream.

I stand amid the roar
Of a surf-tormented shore,
And I hold within my hand
Grains of the golden sand —
How few! yet how they creep
Through my fingers to the deep,
While I weep — while I weep!
O God! Can I not grasp
Them with a tighter clasp?
O God! can I not save
One from the pitiless wave?
Is all that we see or seem
But a dream within a dream?

Crocodile King
Christina Rossetti

Hear now a curious dream I dreamed last night
Each word whereof is weighed and sifted truth.
I stood beside Euphrates while it swelled
Like overflowing Jordan in its youth:
It waxed and coloured sensibly to sight;
Till out of myriad pregnant waves there welled
Young crocodiles, a gaunt blunt-featured crew,
Fresh-hatched perhaps and daubed with birthday dew.
The rest if I should tell, I fear my friend
My closest friend would deem the facts untrue;
And therefore it were wisely left untold;
Yet if you will, why, hear it to the end.

Each crocodile was girt with massive gold
And polished stones that with their wearers grew:
But one there was who waxed beyond the rest,
Wore kinglier girdle and a kingly crown,
Whilst crowns and orbs and sceptres starred his breast.
All gleamed compact and green with scale on scale,
But special burnishment adorned his mail
And special terror weighed upon his frown;
His punier brethren quaked before his tail,
Broad as a rafter, potent as a flail.

So he grew lord and master of his kin:
But who shall tell the tale of all their woes?
An execrable appetite arose,
He battened on them, crunched, and sucked them in.
He knew no law, he feared no binding law,
But ground them with inexorable jaw:
The luscious fat distilled upon his chin,
Exuded from his nostrils and his eyes,
While still like hungry death he fed his maw;
Till every minor crocodile being dead
And buried too, himself gorged to the full,
He slept with breath oppressed and unstrung claw.
Oh marvel passing strange which next I saw:
In sleep he dwindled to the common size,
And all the empire faded from his coat.
Then from far off a wingèd vessel came,
Swift as a swallow, subtle as a flame:
I know not what it bore of freight or host,
But white it was as an avenging ghost.
It levelled strong Euphrates in its course;
Supreme yet weightless as an idle mote
It seemed to tame the waters without force
Till not a murmur swelled or billow beat:
Lo, as the purple shadow swept the sands,
The prudent crocodile rose on his feet
And shed appropriate tears and wrung his hands.
What can it mean? you ask. I answer not
For meaning, but myself must echo,
What? And tell it as I saw it on the spot.

We dream—it is good we are dreaming—
Emily Dickinson

We dream—it is good we are dreaming—
It would hurt us—were we awake—
But since it is playing—kill us,
And we are playing—shriek—

What harm? Men die—externally—
It is a truth—of Blood—
But we—are dying in Drama—
And Drama—is never dead—

Cautious—We jar each other—
And either—open the eyes—
Lest the Phantas—prove the Mistake—
And the livid Surprise

Cool us to Shafts of Granite—
With just an Age—and Name—
And perhaps a phrase in Egyptian—
It's prudenter—to dream—

**Sunday, 4 A.M.**
*Elizabeth Bishop*

An endless and flooded
dreamland, lying low,
cross- and wheel-studded
like a tick-tack-toe.
At the right, ancillary,
'Mary''s close and blue.
Which Mary? Aunt Mary?
Tall Mary Stearns I knew?

The old kitchen knife box,
full of rusty nails,
is at the left. A high vox
humana somewhere wails:

The gray horse needs shoeing!
It's always the same!
What are you doing,
there, beyond the frame?

If you're the donor,
you might do that much!
Turn on the light. Turn over.
On the bed a smutch--
black-and-gold gesso
on the altered cloth.
The cat jumps to the window;
in his mouth's a moth.

Dream dream confronting,
now the cupboard's bare.
The cat's gone a-hunting.
The brook feels for the stair.

The world seldom changes,
but the wet foot dangles

until a bird arranges
two notes at right angles.

**Dream 2**
*Eileen Myles*

the car had a cover over it
and it was over the wheels
and it hurt my ass and I
couldn't sleep. It seems I should move, go forward now
I was wandering through the jungle
anywhere on earth but I was a woman
in bed in New York and how many
people have died in wild places
dreaming you were still in bed
would you know. Travel well
I said to my dog when she
went on her journey thinking
of a cheap movie
I’ve thought this was an urn
turning this was on water
this was flat
but now I see light between
the trees I see water trickling
through stone this is not
made of language but energy
that will stop when I die
the dream dies too
one bolt

**my dream about being white**
*Lucille Clifton*

hey music and
me
only white,
hair a flutter of
fall leaves
circling my perfect
line of a nose,
no lips,
no behind, hey
white me
and i’m wearing
white history
but there’s no future
in those clothes
so i take them off and
wake up
dancing.

**Concordance [Working backward in sleep]**
*Mei-me Berssenbrugge*

Working backward in sleep, the
last thing you numbed to is what
wakes you.

What if that image were Eros as
words?

What would it be like if you
contemplated my words and I felt
you?

Animals, an owl, frog, open their
eyes, and a mirror forms on the
ground.

When insight comes in a dream,
and events the next day
illuminate it, this begins your
streaming consciousness,
synchronicity, asymptotic lines
of the flights of concordances.

An owl opens its eyes in deep
woods.

For the first time, I write and you
don't know me.

Milkweed I touch floats.

**As My Life is a Dream**
*Chungmi Kim*

I painted a phoenix in bright colors
cut it in nine pieces and cooked it
in a pot at the mountaintop.
I stirred it as if cranking reels of
a movie. Unraveled were a series
of faces in mosaic.

Kurosawa appeared. He asked me
what my story was about.
Tongue-tied, I could not answer.
He handed me a token with a silvery
eagle engraved, ready to fly.

How real I thought everything was
in my dream!

In my waking hour, I see
the remnant of the war between
my head and heart.

Now in cease-fire, my chest is filled
with the fresh breeze of serenity.
I begin to breathe gently as my story
is unraveled like in a movie.

No longer haunted, my love of God soars
as I see my guardian angel smile
in the clear blue sky, transforming to
one gigantic phoenix.

My wandering in the wilderness of
the mind has taught me a little wisdom.
I believe my dreams are real
as my life is a dream.
The Rapture of My Dark Dream  
*Edna St Vincent Millay*

When the tree-sparrows with no sound through the pearl-pale air  
Of dawn, down the apple-branches, stair by stair,  
With utmost, unforgettable, elegance and grace  
Descended to the bare ground (never bare  
Of small strewn seeds  
For forced-down flyers at this treacherous time of year),  
And richly and sweetly twittered there,  
I pressed my forehead to the window, butting the cold glass  
Till I feared it might break, disturbing the sparrows, so let the moment pass  
When I had hoped to recapture the rapture of my dark dream;  
I had heard as I awoke my own voice thinly scream,  
"Where? in what street? (I knew the city) did they attack  
You, bound for home?"

You were, of course, not there.  
And I of course wept, remembering where I last had met you  
Yet clawed with desperate nails at the sliding dream, screaming not to lose, since I cannot forget you.

I felt the hot tears come;  
Streaming with useless tears, which make the ears roar and the eyelids swell,  
My blind face sought the window-sill  
To cry on--frozen mourning melted by sly sleep,  
Slapping hard-bought repose with quick successive blows until it whimper and outright weep.  
The tide pulls twice a day,  
The sunlit and the moonlit tides  
Drag the rough ledge away  
And bring back seaweed, little else besides.  
Oh, do not weep these tears salter than the flung spray!--  
Weepers are the sea's brides...  
I mean this the drowning way.