

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*

### **The Dream of a Lover**

*Anonymous Late Medieval Lyric*

Benedicite! whate dreamed I this nyght?  
 Methought the worlde was turnyd 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  
 plesantlye slepyng, thys dreame 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 styll,  
 full softly she drew vnto my beddes syde;  
 she bade me showe hur what was my wyll  
 & my request ytt shuld not be denyed.  
 With þat she kyst me, but & I shulde haue be dede,  
 I cowde not speke my sprytes were soo ferre gone;  
 for verrey 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 away my face.'  
 'Nay, sir,' quod she 'as towchyng thys case,  
 I perdone yow, my owne dere harte, anon.'  
 With þat I toke hur softly, & 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 spryng.  
 Soo glade I was of my dreame, 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-thing but my pylowe yn my armys lyyng.—  
 For when I a-woke ther was but I alone.



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 batted 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 Phantasm—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 pruder—  
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-mei 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 saltier than the flung spray!--  
 Weepers are the sea's brides...  
 I mean this the drowning way.