DREAM AND POETRY:
A PRELIMINARY CHECKLIST

John D. Engle

The following checklist is a starting point for the study of dream and its relationship to poetry. It includes only secondary materials, primarily in English—criticism, history, synthesis, theory. A selected list of primary sources (poems that employ dreams as subject or method) will appear at a later date.

To a degree this checklist is arbitrary. A complete bibliography would have to include a large proportion of the published criticism on such poets as Dante, Chaucer, or Coleridge, whose works often rely heavily upon dream and vision. Consequently, within the limitations of space and good sense, I have tried to choose those critical works which focus most sharply upon the relationship of dream to poetry or the process of creating poetry. In addition, I have suggested a few broad studies that might be useful both in themselves and for the bibliographies they may include.

I have organized the checklist chronologically, placing works which do not fit easily within one time period in an introductory "General" section. I have annotated only the references I was able to inspect; of course, some, like Freud or Jung, need no introduction.

For such a checklist to remain fully useful, it must live, charged by continual revision and addition. We hope the readers of Dreamworks will help insure the continuous development of our resources for the study of dreams and literature (fiction as well as poetry) by contributing to subsequent editions of the checklist. If you have a pertinent entry to suggest, please contact me at the following address:

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Interesting generalizations on the unconscious in literary art and criticism, with specific treatment of Hamlet, Paradise Lost, Melville, Lawrence, Shaw, and Hemingway. Useful, though its relationship to dreams and poetry per se is tangential.
Generalizes about the significance and role of dreams in primitive societies, with implications re. the relationship between dreams and literature. Includes chapter on an “Historical Review of Dream Interpretation” and long section on dreams and various American Indian cultures.


Megriz, Rudolph Louis. The Dream World: A Survey of the History and Mystery of Dreams. London: John Lane, 1939. Included in this history of dream works and attitudes toward dreams are numerous remarks on the dream in poetry, from the Greeks through Eliot’s “ Hollow Men.”


Covers the frequent occurrence of dreams in literature, including “Dream of the Rood,” “Pearl,” Piers Plowman, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Bunyan, the Romantics, and others.


ANCIENT


**MEDIATEVAL**

Aronoff, Marcia. “Dream and Non-Dream in Dante’s *The Vita Nuova*.” *Cithara* 16, i. pp. 18–32.


Curry, Walter Clyde. *Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences*. N.Y., 1926. Covers the relationship between Chaucer’s knowledge of medieval scientific principles and the *Canterbury Tales*. Includes chapters on “Medieval Dream-Lore” and “Chauuntecleer and Pertelote on Dreams.”


Higgs, Elton D. "The Path to Involvement: The Centrality of the Dreamer in *Piers Plowman."
*Tulane Studies* in English 21, 1974, pp. 1-34.


Deals with the dreamer in the C Passus of *Piers Plowman* and the psychological significance for Langland of certain of the dream sequences.


Compact survey of ancient and mediaeval dream theories, culminating in study of the vision genre.


Traces tradition through Boethius, Alan of Lille, and others. Includes chapters on Dante and the *Pearl.*


Excellent survey of dream-poetry in English from 14th to 16th Century. Among other topics, discusses classical, Biblical, and French sources, Chaucer, the Chaucerian and alliterative traditions. Includes useful "Booklist" of primary and secondary sources.


**RENAISSANCE THROUGH 18th CENTURY**


Solid biography and critical reading. The author says that "sleep frees the fancy from the control of reason, and thus projects it into a dangerously undisciplined world.... Dreams are, to Crabbe, a release of the mind's moral sensibility." Covers personal dreams and their artistic use.


A history of the roots of Christian mystical contemplation and vision, with extensive remarks on such poets as Robert Southwell, Nicholas Breton, and Spenser.


Mentions many examples of the dream element in Renaissance and Metaphysical poets.


Excellent general introduction to the dream in Western literature and, specifically, the 17th Century. Includes chapters: “Major Theories of the Dream from Homer to Hobbes,” “Typical Uses of the Dream in Western Literature,” “Dream Visions in Seventeenth-Century English Literature,” and chapters on the dream in Milton and 17th Century lyric poetry, drama, and narrative. Includes useful bibliography.


19th CENTURY


Includes brief bibliography, extensive notes.


Includes bibliography.


Coleridge’s dream poem in light of Freud and Silberer.


Includes bibliography.


Recent critical study of French symbolist, whose personal and artistic interest in dream and drug-induced states is well known.


Recent biography. Examines Blake’s visions and the poetry. Bibliography.


Sees Baudelaire’s poem as dream brought on artificially by “stupefiant.”


Classic study of William Blake.


Broad sketch, including remarks on Shelley’s dreams and visions.


Examines the effect of opium upon the imagination, both in theory and in practice. Covers opium experience in such writers as Crabbe, Coleridge, DeQuincey, Collins, Francis Thompson, and Keats. Includes a chapter on Romantic attitudes towards dreams and creativity.


Examines the relationship between Blake’s visions and Milton.


Discusses appeal of the dream vision to Shelley, particularly in relation to Alastor.
Examinates movement in Tennyson's poems from the need for verifiable knowledge towards the acceptance of a dream-state as a source of wisdom.

Sees Coleridge's poem as the result of opium-reinforced elation in a manic-depressive. Followed by brief "Comment" on the article by Mabel Worthington.

Numerous references to dreams.

Covers narcissistic daydreaming and "paranoic fantasy" (Freud) in Swinburne's "The Triumph of Time" and other poems.

Classic account of the development of Coleridge's imagination and art.

Psychoanalytic look at Coleridge's ode, with attention given to the dark dream from which the poet turns in horror.

Extended reading of Coleridge's poem. Includes remarks on scholarly background and extensive bibliography of "Christabel" criticism.


Discusses Wordsworth's Dream of the Arab as projection of the poet's own mind.

Psychoanalytic reading that at times closely examines the relationship between Blake's dream-visions and his poetry. Bibliography.

A reading of Coleridge's dream-poem, "Kubla Khan," in light of recurrent imagery in the poet's other work.

Ware, J. Garth. "Coleridge's Great Poems Reflecting the Mother Imago." American Imago XVIII, #4, pp. 331–52.

20th CENTURY

Among other things, Yeats was a renowned Blake scholar. Examines the thematic and aesthetic relationship between the two poets whose work was so heavily affected by visions and dreams.

Colussi, D. L. "Roethke's 'The Gentle.'" The Explicator 27, #9, 1969, entry 73.
Examines frustration of dream persona, Horace.

Classic study, containing much on the relationship of dream, occultism, and theosophy to Yeats's poetry. Yeats said that "dreams are an existence and not a thought, and make our world of the tea-tables seem but a shabby penumbra."

Discusses the relationship between dream and myth in the poetry of Aiken, Auden, Eliot, Graves, Lowell, Muir, and Yeats.

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A collection of essays on such topics as Yeats's unpublished occult papers, his
relationship to Jung, and his knowledge of spiritualistic and psychic research.
Volume of long poems, with useful introduction by Norman Holmes Pearson,
commenting on, among other things, the dream-fantasy structure of the poetry.
Studies of the poets within the context of myth, folklore, and dreams.
Holland, Norman N. "Freud and H. D." International Journal of Psycho-Analysis 50,
Hurry, David. "William Carlos Williams's Paterson and Freud's Interpretation of Dreams."
Literature and Psychology XXVIII, #3 and 4, 1978, pp. 170-77.
Work of Imagination."
Nemerov, Howard. Journal of the Fictive Life. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press,
1965.
Psychological, personal narrative concerned with the creative process. Includes a
number of personal dreams, interesting with regard to Nemerov's poetry.
Newman, Charles. "Candour is the only Wile: The Art of Sylvia Plath." Triquarterly #7,
pp. 39-64.
Examines Plath's work in light of Freud on dreams and wish-fulfillment.
Phillips, Michael J. Edwin Muir: A Master of Modern Poetry. Indianapolis: Hackett,
1978.
Recent study of the Scottish poet. Like Kafka, whom he translated, Muir was obsessed
by dreams. The main influence upon his work: memories of childhood come back to
him as powerfully vivid dreams and visions. Contains excellent review of earlier criticism.
Quinn, Sister Bernetta. "Paterson: Landscape and Dream." Journal of Modern Literature 1,
Williams felt that dream was "a vehicle whereby to lift fact into symbol." Explores this
view and its relationship to the method and structure of Paterson.
Includes chapters on "Yeats's Debt to William Blake" and "Traditional Symbolism in
Kubla Khan," as well as essays on Edwin Muir, St. John Perse, and other poets.
pp. 178-90.
Looks closely at "The Wanderings of Oisin" as well as other poems.
Compact study of the Irish poet who, particularly in his early work, sees dreams and
poetry as intimately related: both arise from mental conflict and attempt to resolve
that conflict.
Thornbury, Charles W. "The Significance of Dreams in The Dream Songs." Literature and
Berrymen from 77 Dream Songs: "Many opinions and errors in the Songs are to be
referred not to the nature of the author, but to the title of the work." Examines relationship of poetry to dream in Berrymen's Dream Songs and in
his criticism.
Webster, Brenda S. Yeats: A Psychoanalytic Study. Stanford: Stanford University Press,
Examines the creative process in Yeats's work. Answers questions posed in the intro-
duction: "How does Yeats first embody fantasies and daydreams in his poems and
plays? How do they change and develop? How, finally, is Yeats's view of himself and
his body related to his progress from the dreamy... early work to the hard, concise
richness and complexity of his late poems?" For interesting critique of the book, cf.
Hahn, Claire. "Yeats Studies and the Parameters of Psychoanalytic Criticism."
Literature and Psychology XXIV, #4, 1974, pp. 171-6.