This bibliography provides a beginning for the interdisciplinary study of the nightmare. We have included only "secondary" material, though a few entries are dream anthologies with commentary. The entries concern both nightmare in and of itself (psychological and psychiatric studies) and the use of nightmare in folklore and the arts (mostly literature, painting and film).

The central problem in such a project is establishing criteria for what qualifies as a nightmare. In the absence of any universally accepted definition, we have tried to include anything that simply involves a frightening dream that does not necessarily awaken the dreamer. A few entries do not explicitly take up dream, but the nature of their subject, for example, Lovecraft, seems inherently tied to the nightmare.

Since this list really represents only a starting point, we hope it will be continually added to, both in areas we have touched on and those—like music and nightmare—we have not.


Comments on terror from the dream world in Aeschylus' Orestia.


Burton, R. Anatomy of Melancholy. 1621.


Two different kinds of mirror dreams are presented: one in which the subject sees himself in the mirror and emerges from the dream reassured and with integration and new insight; and the mirror dreams in which a distorted reflection or no reflection at all is seen in the mirror. The latter type of mirror dream is followed by terror and sometimes by dreams of monsters, by hypochondriacal concerns, and the emergence of poorly integrated activity.


"Lautreamont shatters the complacent acceptance of the reality proposed by their cultural traditions, and makes [the readers] see reality for what it is: an unreal nightmare all the more hair-raising because the sleeper believes that he is awake."

De La Mare, Walter. Behold, This Dreamer. London: Faber and Faber, 1939. An anthology of literary dreams with commentary, including a separate section on nightmares.


Discusses why even frightening dreams can be wish-fulfillment.


Treats "The Garden of Earthly Delights" and "The Hell of Music" as dream images.


A study of Coleridge, which includes a long chapter on his dreams, many of which were nightmares. "It is not easy to think of any artist to whom sleep regularly inflicted such frightful torments." His poems are "charged with the turbulence of his chaotic inner life, a nightmare realm."


Children's fears, dreams, wishes, daydreams, likes, dislikes, pleasant and unpleasant manners.


A section on "night terrors" is found on pp. 96-97. The most helpful section in terms of nightmares is found on pp. 301-324 in the section entitled "Types of Dreams." In this section, different archetypal kinds of dreams, and themes, are interpreted and identified. The kinds of dreams include: "traumatic dreams," "anxiety dreams," "dreams of falling," and "dreams of death."


Reviews objective reports, surveys, observations, and studies relating to nightmare behavior. Criticism of experiments and possible improvements in existing methodology are considered and suggestions for future research are offered. Recent applications of behavioral methodology to treatment of pathological nightmare behavior are also surveyed.

Hillman goes back to classical theories in terms of poetics of mythology. He relates our dreaming life to the myths of the underworld—the dark side of the soul, its images and shadows—and to the gods and figures of death. This leads to a re-visualization of dream interpretation in relation to the psychology of "dying." He concludes with a long section on specific dream images and themes as they appear in psychological praxis. Hillman's approach is reminiscent of Jung's in its attention to archetypal themes.


Includes discussion of nightmares in French Romantic Literature.


A sympathetic study of witches and folk medicine, including the causes and cures of nightmares.


Janson, H.W. Fuseli's "Nightmare." Arts and Sciences, Spring 1963.


An anthology of dreams, some literary, with commentary and extensive notes. Includes a separate section on nightmares.


Examines the pathology of the nightmare, and its connections with medieval superstitions.


Kelchner, Georgia D. Dreams in Old Norse Literature and Their Affinities in Folklore. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935.

Discusses "trolls" (evil beings) in frightening dreams.


Leuret, Fragments Psychologiques sur la Folie. 1834.


Discusses the effects of nightmare on waking behavior.
Reads "The Night Cafe" as a frightening dream.


Presents a general survey of theory and research on nightmares, emphasizing why they occur and the various determinants of the anxiety experienced during nightmares.

Considers the "nightmare state" as a narrative strategy in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Discards the possibility that Coleridge composed the poem during a creative act of dreaming; instead speculates on the "materials from his own experience" which Coleridge used "to compose the mariner's reverie."

A discussion of De Quincey's nightmares from a political-psychological perspective.
One chapter is entitled, "The Oriental Nightmare."


General consideration of the "Catholic grotesque" as vision and technique in Flannery O'Connor's works. Discusses O'Connor's ability to "create a landscape wherein life is already hellish, and where men are possessed by demons and devils who completely control their souls and who subject them to excruciating torment."


Several chapters on literary dreams including one on nightmare.

Summary of traditional monsters and their significance to human psychology.

Discusses how the work was executed and how it served as catalyst for future developments in the arts. Also examines some predecessors in the use of the nightmare.

Presents clinical material to clarify the symbolic meaning of the elephant. Appearing initially as part of a nightmare, the elephant is considered to represent the patient's anxiety related to aggression. The function of animal symbolism in primitive tribes, religion, and mythology is explored.

Considers the nature of the horror Poe illicit in his tales. Pages 89 to 113 focus on the elements which constitute Poe's "nightmarish" narratives.


Contains two essays: James Hillman's "psychological introductions to Roscher's Ephialtes" in which Hillman comments, clarifies, and expands from Roscher's essay on Pan, the goat-god as the "demon or evil spirit of nightmares." Following a general introduction to the life and works of Roscher, Hillman considers the possible connections between masturbation, rape, nightmares, and a "healing from madness" as they relate to the mythical figure, Pan.


Traces Dürer's deluge nightmare from historical events and shows its psychological significance.


Contains a discussion of the nightmare motif in Fuseli and other artists.


Chapter five, "The 'Hell' Symbolism," discusses elements of horror, the grotesque, and fear in the "Dreams."


Lovecraft and his relation to other writers of the macabre, especially Poe.


Examines nightmares and Fuseli's artistic process.

Tryon, Thomas. Pythagoras: His Mystic Philosophy Revived, or The Mystery of Dreams Unfolded. London: Thomas Salisbury, 1689

"Wherein the causes, natures, and uses of nocturnal representations, and the communications both of good and evil angels, and also departed souls, to mankind, are theosophically unfolded."


Succinct, general resource book. No one section on "nightmares" but references to "bad dreams" are found throughout. Includes general comments on tribes and cultures heavily influenced by dreams and dreaming. Makes references to beliefs about "bad dreams," or nightmares, of different peoples and cultures.


Excellent current resource book; a collection of essays on research, theories, and the applications of dreams and dreaming. Brief treatment of nightmares and night terrors on pages 48-49.


A psychoanalytic reading of Richard’s dream in the last act of Richard III.


Describes the traditions on which Lautreamont drew in creating his nightmare poem, Les Chants de Maldoror.