

Goya, Blake, and Fuseli: The Nightmare in Romantic Art

by

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Goya, Blake, and Fuseli: The Nightmare in Romantic Art

Dream, or nightmare? Rationality, or madness? In life, these questions are universal, for everyone has wondered at some point what happens beneath the surface of the mind. Yet, for some artists, the goal is to go even further: What would happen if one could actually harness the inventive and creative force within this other, inner world, particularly those ideas which are formulated during sleep?

Dreams, visions, and nightmares have intrigued the art world for centuries. Yet, it was during the Romantic era (roughly 1750-1850 C.E.) that the idea of dreams acting as a generative, creative force arguably reached its peak. Early Romantics such as William Blake, Henry Fuseli, and Francisco Goya each used the influential subconscious to enhance their work and explore the power of imagination. And despite their different approaches, all three of these artists held great influence on future artists who were active during the resurgence of Romanticism in the late 1800s. Symbolist artists such as Albert Pinkham Ryder, James Ensor, and Odilon Redon continued the Romantic fascination with the dream world, using dreams and visions to experiment with early modern principles. For both the Romantics and the Symbolists, dreams – especially nightmares – were highly relevant, just as they were to society as a whole. Of course, this interest continued and arguably reached another peak with the Surrealists in the early twentieth century; artists such as André Breton and Salvador Dali plumbed the depths of the subconscious and offered varying methods of exposing and representing it. Yet for the purposes of this paper, which stays inside the boundary of pre-1900 art, the Romantic period remains the most relevant in terms of impact on later movements. Today's modern associations between dreams and art were undeniably shaped during the Romantic period. These Romantic artists, in

defying the dominion of scientific rationality, primarily explored the world of dreams, nightmares, and the imagination as a means of discovering and generating creative content.

The Romantic influence on the art world runs both deep and broad, but pinpointing when exactly the Romantic movement began is less clear. Throughout history, there has always been something of an issue in defining artistic periods by a certain span of years or a set of visual characteristics. This fact is especially true during the period between 1700 and 1850, as so many genres and movements clashed and coincided with one another. For instance, Romanticism is often thought of as a direct artistic counter to the Neoclassical movement, and this is true in the most basic of terms. Romanticism was, in part, an organic reaction against the “artificial, imitation-heavy” Classical ideas championed by such Neoclassicists as Jacques-Louis David (Brion 8-9). Neoclassicism was often considered *the* style of the Enlightenment, reflecting the Enlightenment ideas of intellect, science, and reason. Romanticism, on the other hand, was more concerned with values of faith, nature, and emotion. Thus, the Romantic period is often cited as being more in line with the Counter-Enlightenment, which ran parallel to the Enlightenment during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Nevertheless, the Romantic era cannot be separated so easily from the greater environment in which it operated. As art historian Marcel Brion notes, Romanticism can be characterized as a “condition of human consciousness which manifests itself . . . in infinitely varied domains of art, philosophy, music, and poetry” (13). As such, some Romantic artists preferred a largely mystical or spiritual approach to art. However, continues Brion, the philosophies of Romanticism did involve some “reflections in realms of science and sociology,” especially as the movement overlapped with the scientific revolution of the eighteenth century (13). Thus, other Romantics embraced this influence rather than shunned it, employing scientific

principles as a way of exploring the less quantifiable mysteries of the world. These artists and writers actually merged, rather than separated, rationality and imagination. The life of the inner human mind, which was primarily thought of as the *subconscious* or *psyche*, was viewed as a psychological and physiological explanation for the unexplainable: ideas or feelings that cannot be entirely justified by scientific rationality. And for the Romantics who loved both science and mysticism, one of the best vehicles through which to explore the inner psyche was found in dreams.

The three main Romantic beliefs about dreams are that they are representations of reality, that they have a “formative function” on the daily lives of individuals, and that activities in dreams are “analogous to poetic creation” (Wilson xii). In other words, ideas and actions in the dream world are just as pertinent and possible as in the world of reality. Today, we have a relatively strict definition of *dreaming*, but the Romantics had a much looser interpretation, with “dream” having a variety of synonyms including “reverie, trance, daydream, vision, and nightmare” (Wilson xi). In fact, the words “dream” and “vision” are practically interchangeable in Romantic art, literature, and poetry (Wilson xii). The Romantics regarded dreams and visions as a “buffer against the ordinary,” departing from history and fact to depict instead the inner mind of the dreamer, inviting the viewer to peek inside a “uniquely subjective consciousness” (Wilson xiii).

The “ordinary” against which the Romantics wanted to create a buffer was the Age of Enlightenment. Balking against scientific and intellectual idealism, the Romantic period embraced that which the Enlightenment feared the most: the monster of irrational disorder. Writes Scholar José Monleon, “As perceived by the Age of Enlightenment, the monster was the image by which unreason penetrated order. The monster . . . was the barbarian, the foreigner, the

one that introduced violence, madness, and disorder into a system considered to be the reign of pure reason” (35). This idea of the “modern monster” would frequently manifest itself in depictions of dark dreams and nightmares, giving corporeal form to society’s growing anxiety and unrest.

Although the scientific enlightenment strongly favored reason over illusion, the same time period also saw a drastic increase in the creative importance of imagination and seeking “new correspondences and connections” with the natural world. While some chose to find these connections through the natural sciences, others turned to less-rational methods that relied more on experiences with dreams, hallucinations, ‘primitive’ cultures, or even childhood memories. Romantic figures alike were fascinated with the power of the imagination, attracted “precisely because it is indecipherable” and thus renders any rational thinking or previous experience utterly useless as a means of explanation (Gamboni 42). Unlike the scientific methods that reigned supreme in Enlightenment philosophy, dreams and the inner mind do not produce testable hypotheses and regulated, repeatable results. As such, a primary concept in Romantic philosophy involved exploring the inner mind through visions and dreams, seeking out imaginative answers to these unexplainable questions.

In the 1600s, German rationalist Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716) diverted from the popular *tabula rasa* approach of English humanist John Locke (1632-1704). Locke theorized that the mind begins as a blank slate that is then impressed upon by external sensory factors. Leibniz, in contrast, proposed that the mind is predisposed to having certain feelings *regardless* of outside influence. Leibniz also suggested that the human mind contains an “active power” of imagination that enables it to harness these innate ideas of feeling and sensation (Gamboni 42).

These theories by Leibniz and others were highly influential in developing further philosophies during the eighteenth century, specifically those of the German idealists Johannes Tetens (1736-1807) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). For Tetens, the imagination moves from a passive interior role to an outwardly creative one, not only organizing mental representations but also composing *new* ones. Similarly, Kant regards the imagination as “informing our very perception of the world,” enabling aesthetic order and preference toward any experience with nature (Gamboni 43). Clearly these attitudes regarding the imagination were highly persuasive on the thought of the Romantics, who agreed that dreams and the imagination were inherently creative and capable of generating new concepts.

In terms of impact, the ideas of German philosopher Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854) are perhaps the most influential regarding the Romantic imagination, with Schelling advocating for the “absolute unity of mind and nature.” Schelling viewed the imagination as the “eternally creating primal energy,” with art acting as a force of instinctual creation rather than a mere imitation of nature (Gamboni 43). These ideas would go on to influence poets and artists like Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who believed that “the process of art joins nature with the self-conscious mind in one seamless product . . . [the] imaginative vision” (Engell and Bate xc). And finally, rather than turning entirely away from the reality of science, Schelling embraced scientific reasoning (and particularly biology) as a way to merge the “objective world of nature” with the “subjective world of the self” (Richards 174).

Nature was the key to the Romantic spirit. Romantic artists, having eschewed the “obligations of classical beauty,” found renewed inspiration in the natural world at large. The Romantic fascination with an environment that was both terrifying and beautiful established itself in the concept of the sublime. In basic terms, the sublime can be defined as an

overwhelming sensation of awe and terror generated through interaction with the natural world. The themes of nature and the sublime are especially prevalent in Romantic landscape painting, so much so that a schism actually separated British landscape artists into two distinct groups (Brion 47).

The first group of British artists regarded nature with the mindset of Realism, depicting reality as it is naturally found “in the objective existence of things.” Popular realist landscape artists included members of the Norwich school (founders John Crome and Robert Ladbrooke; Henry Bright; and George Vincent). But while the Realists attempted a “poetic transcription of nature,” the Romantics explored fantasy and dreams in order to uncover a “new reality” (Brion 124). This divergent group of landscape artists saw nature as an interpretation of imagination or sympathy and sometimes even an exaggeration or fictionalization of reality. A few of these Romantic landscape artists include John Constable, Thomas Gainsborough, J.M.W. Turner, and Samuel Palmer. Gainsborough in fact created many of his landscapes from fantasy, not painting real scenes at all but choosing instead to construct or invent them himself (Brion 68). This matter of subjectivity arguably reached its peak with the works of Turner whose paintings included “subjectivism . . . so absolute that it became . . . a visionary surrealism” (Brion 62).

One of the most profound theorists of the time regarding the connections between landscape painting and the unconscious mind was the German-born Carl Gustav Carus (1789-1869). Carus was a veritable Renaissance man: physiologist, scientist, writer, and artist. He was also close friends with leading German writer and poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), and the two friends would often critique each other’s respective work and ideas.

In his seminal *Nine Letters on Landscape Painting* (1831), Carus uses personal letters to detail his philosophy on landscape painting. Because these letters are written over a period of

nine years, Carus' opinions naturally shift over time. Starting out in 1815, Carus' views on landscapes most closely align with those of German Romantic artist Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840). Like Friedrich, Carus posited that contemplation of nature ultimately leads to understanding of the self. However, by the end of his *Letters* in 1824, it is clear that Carus has shifted into a more inclusive understanding of the landscape painting with what he calls the "all-encompassing ensoulment of nature" (Bätschmann 7). In this way, Carus broadens his definition of nature to join both scientific reasoning and artistic mysticism, thus bridging the gap between Enlightenment and Romantic ideals.

In defining the important relationship between art and the psyche, Carus positions the principle task of painting as being "the representation of a certain mood of mental life (meaning) through reproduction of a corresponding mood of natural life (truth)" (Carus 91). He also finds a relationship between mental moods and natural states, with nature directly influencing the psyche of the viewer and depending upon whether or not the viewer's mind is preoccupied:

Here, as in nature, the archetypal states combine in countless ways: in a state of aspiration, the feeling of the impossibility of attainment may lead to melancholy; inner conflict may arise when the feeling of perfect strength is assailed by external, destructive forces; renewed courage may spring from apathy; and so forth . . . The unpreoccupied mind draws encouragement and stimulus from the aspiring, vigorous life of nature, from pure morning light, and from a bright spring scene; is cheered and calmed by the clear, blue air of summer and by the sheer abundance of forest leaves in calm air; turns melancholy as nature slows to a halt in the autumnal gloom; and is driven in on itself and bound fast by the shroud of winter darkness. (Carus 93-94)

It is not unreasonable that Carus would believe in a correlation between the natural landscape – with its sublime awe and beauty – and the contents of the viewer's dreams, with nature directly impacting the human psyche.

Carus' views on the psyche revolve around his theory of 'psychological idealism,' which "refuses the traps of both psychology as empirical science and idealism as philosophical

metaphysics” (Hillman viii). Thus, like his views on nature, his representation of the subconscious is neither pure science nor pure philosophy. In addition to pre-Freudian views of the psyche, Carus also draws upon past philosophers Leibniz and Kant as well as his contemporaries such as Friedrich Schiller, the key philosopher of German Romanticism. And while he has a firm understanding of the psychological and scientific processes of the mind, Carus also holds to a “holistic view, placing the unconscious and the psyche within a meaningful universe whose main focus for him is life” (Hillman vii-viii). For Carus, the act of painting was a direct extension of the inner soul of the painter, and this view would go on to influence generations of artists to come. One such artist who shared Carus’ preoccupation with relating art and the hidden aspects of the psyche was the illuminating artist and writer William Blake.

William Blake (British, 1757-1827) was one of the early Romantics, becoming active in the 1770s. A tragic event in his personal life (the death of his younger brother, Robert) had a profound effect on Blake’s philosophy and work. At age 30, immediately following Robert’s death, Blake’s interest in the imagination as a creative force grew significantly. Blake viewed dreams and visions with a prophetic, spiritual sensibility, believing that dreams were a path of communication between the spiritual world and reality. Dream imagery holds a substantial role in Blake’s oeuvre, with many of his works drawing from dreams that were either his own or part of literary texts.

The influence of dreams on Blake’s work was strengthened further when he adopted the Swedenborgian philosophy in 1789, a brand of English mysticism that had been led by visionary poet and scientist Emmanuel Swedenborg (Swedish, 1688-1772). Dreams were a vital component of Swedenborgian beliefs, with founder Swedenborg himself claiming to have “experienced a sequence of dreams which convinced him that he had made contact with the

hidden spiritual world” (King 56). Blake was most attracted to the Swedenborgian claim that the “appearance of ordinary objects was a veil behind which their true essences were concealed,” which infuses even mundane reality with a dream-like sense of mysticism and wonder.

The vibrant, prophetic scenes that Blake frequently painted were likewise influenced by “waking dreams” that he experienced (King 58). His glowing *The Ancient of Days* (1794) [fig. 1], for example, came from an “apparition” he claims to have seen floating above him at the top of his stairs. These types of “illuminations” happened so often, in fact, that the epithet “visionary artist” followed his name in a 1797 petition, “as if the highly individual works he created partook of an established pictorial genre” (Clay 247). Although Blake’s self-declaration as a “visionary artist” might seem a little pompous, visions were nevertheless important to Blake, and he regarded their imagery and meanings with utmost sincerity.

Furthermore, it is no surprise that Blake would take literary manifestations of the imagination just as seriously as he regarded his own visions. Blake drew inspiration from many works of literature including Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and Shakespeare’s plays such as *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. Blake was also a devout man, and thus many of his works are illustrations of biblical scenes that involved visions or dreams. One example is the work *Job’s Evil Dreams* [fig. 2] from Blake’s series *Illustrations of the Book of Job* (c. 1805-1810). The figure of Job lies in the center of the composition while Satan hovers above him, having been deceptively transfigured into an “angel of light.” The flames of Hell engulf the bottom of the composition as demons reach up and grab Job’s body while he sleeps (Tate Britain). The title and accompanying text reference Job 7:14: “With Dreams upon my bed thou scarest me & affrightest me with Visions.” Further imagery and text in the work comes from later references in the same Book, including “my skin is black upon me and my bones are burned with heat” from chapter 30. Overall, the scene in

Job's Evil Dreams is clearly more nightmarish than dream-like, and this type of terrifying imagery is a common theme in Blake's work which often gives bodily form to demons and nightmares.

Similar imagery appears in *The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed with the Sun* (ca. 1805-1810) [fig. 3] in which Blake depicts demonic creature invading a heavenly, dream-like scene. The title again refers to the Bible, this time Revelation 12:1-4 involving a monster that hovers above a woman giving birth, waiting to devour the newborn infant. With the powerful composition of this disturbing scene, Blake evokes a "cannibalistic maniac" authorized by Satan to wreak havoc upon both heaven and earth (King 192). Most emphatic is Blake's use of color, for Blake did not utilize color for purely aesthetic purposes. Instead, his color choices were directly tied into his spiritual beliefs; Blake believed color had a literal code within itself through which it could emblemize the world separate from reality. His frequent use of reds and yellows in particular, such as in *The Great Red Dragon*, represents a "magical process through which humanity gains access to the spiritual universe" (Clay 247). Thus, Blake's scenes of dreams and visions employ specific colors in order to enhance the works' connections with the spiritual world. In doing so, Blake demonstrates that a powerful creative force lies within visions, one that can break through the spiritual wall and influence even the daily work of an artist.

Blake has long been considered a revolutionary artist even during his own lifetime. His ideas regarding spirituality and dreams in painting held great influence over the art world at large. Towards the end of his life, however, Blake's views became more conservative and clashed with the more radical ideas of the newer, upcoming Romantic artists. The clearest generational difference lies in Blake's view on nature and its connection with spirituality. Although Blake

generally shared Carus' views on art and the psyche, his views on nature were essentially the opposite. Rather than nature being a conduit for spiritual connection, Blake viewed nature as being "ideologically opposed to . . . spiritual inspiration" (Vaughan 79). In the early 1800s, Blake renounced his former Swedenborgian ideals and returned to more traditionally Christian beliefs. He is famously quoted as saying, "Nature is the work of the Devil," though the quote is often taken without context (Vaughan 79). Yet, dreams and the imagination still retained a vital role in Blake's work as well as his criticism; Blake only really accepted landscapes and nature scenes that had been "improved" by the artist's imagination. Otherwise, thought Blake, such scenes did not have any evidence of God's interference and subsequently they lacked any spiritual or moral value (Adams 100). Accordingly, most of Blake's own landscapes shunned direct realism in favor of a more symbolic and expressionistic view of nature.

Yet, it is important to note that while Blake was staunch in his beliefs, he held a surprisingly diverse group of friends with whom he talked and collaborated. Two of the artists in Blake's "inner circle" who shared Blake's fascination with visions and dreams (albeit expressing them in two very different ways) were Samuel Palmer (1805–1881) and Henry Fuseli (1741-1825).

British artist Samuel Palmer initially wanted to follow in Blake's footsteps in painting religious and figurative pieces (Vaughan 79). However, Palmer ended up devoting much of his work to depicting the hidden emotional and aesthetic qualities of the landscape. Although Palmer shared Blake's philosophies surrounding nature and the spiritual world, Palmer broke away from Blake's influence and distinguished his work in his treatment of the pastoral.

When taken literally, the term "pastoral" involves any rural scene involving sheep. Yet, the artistic and literary connotations of the word run much deeper. The pastoral is often seen as a

backlash against the modernized landscape that has undergone so many drastic changes due to agricultural and industrial growth. Instead of new roads and farm machinery, the pastoral evokes a blissful country-side Arcadia that largely ignores these transformational practices. This idyllic attitude also has roots in Christianity as being “the image of nature spiritualized and redeemed by faith.” This is the context in which Blake viewed his landscapes while illustrating both *The Pastorals of Virgil* and *The Book of Job*. On the other hand, artists such as Palmer embraced this opportunity to challenge the traditional pastoral scene with a more realistic and emotionally heavy approach. Palmer was particularly interested in the pastoral of the night, and his works are much darker in style in comparison to Blake’s bright colors and glittering landscapes.

Palmer’s scenes of nature can most accurately be described in terms of the anti- or “dark pastoral” (Vaughan 81, 112). The impact of the night gives these natural scenes a quiet, dreamy feeling compared to the intense, prophetic vision scenes of Blake, but there is also something slightly sinister about them. Many of Palmer’s works are rendered in deep tones of brown and sepia ink with a dim, natural light. Furthermore, his scenes often occur during twilight (Palmer’s favorite time of the day), which itself carries an association with being the “witching” hour that is highly connected to magic. And while artists such as Caspar David Friedrich viewed a twilight pasture with a sense of spirituality and holiness, Palmer’s view was more subliminal, focusing on the underlying emotion of the scene (Vaughan 113). Rejecting Blake’s spiritual pastoralism in favor of the human emotion, Palmer’s pastoral represents, as art historian William Vaughan writes,

[A] pastoral mode with mythical dimensions . . . a modern yearning, the sense of loss that Baudelaire regarded as so central to Romanticism. [Palmer] does not promote the Pastoral simply as a care-free earthly paradise. It is a place as much of fear and awe, the ‘dark pastoral’ that addresses both the modernist

apprehension of primalist instinct, and a basic cosmic angst that lies behind the perception of the supernatural. It was a view of the Pastoral that challenged as much as it consoled. (115).

Palmer's landscapes, much more than those of Blake, were deeply involved in the concept of the sublime, highlighting the fear as well as beauty he saw when confronted by nature. It is possible that Palmer enjoyed the twilight so much because that was when he felt most connected and stimulated by nature. And during those dim, moonlit hours, the mind is naturally most susceptible to dreams, visions, and the power of fantasy.

Palmer's *Late Twilight* (1825) [fig. 4] contains a dark, autumnal landscape with thinning trees, nocturnal owls, and a large sickle-shaped moon surrounded by a halo of light. A similar moon is seen in many of Palmer's other works, including *A Cornfield by Moonlight with the Evening Star* (1830) [fig. 5] which features a warm fall color palette. In a self-aware jest, Palmer once remarked to someone, possibly a gallery owner, "I am much obliged to you, Sir, for housing my pictures but fear they gave you trouble; however, so many moons in your apartment ought to save the trouble of lighting candles" (Vaughan 175). The moon was a common Romantic literary symbol of spiritual illumination, with possible roots in the publication of Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742-6):

Night is fair virtue's immemorial friend;
The conscious moon, through every distant age
Has held aloft a lamp to wisdom, and let fall
On contemplation's eye her purging ray. (Quoted in Vaughan 176)

Furthermore, one of the most significant poems of the Romantic period was German poet Novalis' *Hymns to the Night* (1800). This type of "literature of darkness" was highly influential in Germany as well as Britain, and Palmer took additional inspiration from other works of literature. One example is the inscription of *Late Twilight* which refers to a quote from *Macbeth* describing twilight: "The west yet glitters with some streaks of day." Also, like his friend Blake,

Palmer was known to write his own poetry connected to his artwork. During his painting of *A Cornfield*, Palmer wrote his poem “Twilight Time,” which reads in part:

Methinks the lingering, dying ray
Of twilight time, doth seem more fair,
And lights the soul up more than day. (Quoted in Vaughan 115)

Palmer’s obsession with the nocturnal, along with Blake’s predisposition for depicting visions and prophetic dreams, speak to the prevalent Romantic fascination with nighttime and the dark side of nature.

Again, this interest in connecting nature circles back to the concept of the sublime, particularly as Irish philosopher Edmund Burke described it. In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756), Burke was the one of the first philosophers to argue that the sublime can be separated from the beautiful, with the sublime representing the purest form of terror one can experience:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger . . . or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling . . . [The] ideas of pain are much more powerful than those which enter on the part of pleasure.
(Burke 26)

For Burke, fear is “the ruling principle of the sublime” (Burke 41), and he was primarily interested in both the physiological and psychological responses one experiences when confronted with an overwhelming natural experience (Ryan 269). Burke believed that great power lay in the “dark, confused, uncertain images” of nature, and these terror-filled images subsequently affected the mind and inner self of their viewer, much like in the psychologically dark landscapes of Palmer (Burke 44). Alongside Palmer, yet another artist in Blake’s friendship circle who also found inspiration in dreams and the darkness of the mind was the Swiss-born artist Henry Fuseli, who was living in England by 1765.

Henry Fuseli (1741-1825) considered the sublime “the highest thing in art” (Bätschmann 16). Like both Blake and Palmer, Fuseli was intrigued by the “other side” of reality: the visionary and spiritual world where the sublime both “fascinates and disturbs the viewer” (King 73). Fuseli’s concept of the sublime – and the terror he associated with it – found its roots primarily in the human condition, drawing inspiration from erotic or macabre situations found in both Greco-Roman myths and contemporary Romantic literature (Clay 105). Fuseli’s erotic tendencies were more blatant than the covert, repressed sexuality of Blake, and Fuseli also placed a higher emphasis on emotion over spirituality (King 73). He was known for his “gesticular and muscular excess,” with exaggerated forms and figures that were quite reminiscent of Mannerism. In fact, Goethe described Fuseli as “an inspired mannerist who parodies himself,” painting a tense, over-the-top world with which the artist actively identified (Clay 107).

Fuseli’s imagination was clearly inclined toward the nocturnal and the macabre, and he went through life seemingly unconcerned with what may come the next day. With a sense of unreality, Fuseli says of his creations in the realm of fantasy: “I am crossing a sea which is shoreless and unplumbed” (Brion 193). Visions and dreams were prevalent influences on Fuseli’s work, who is also quoted as saying, “One of the most unexplored regions of art are dreams” (Powell 37). Writing in Volume III of *The Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli*, Fuseli expands on visions as a mode of artistic creation:

Form, in its widest meaning, the visible universe that envelopes [sic] our senses, and its counterpart the invisible one that agitates our mind with visions bred on sense by fancy, are the element and the realm of invention; it discovers, selects, combines the *possible*, [and] the *probable*. (137)

He then goes on to challenge the traditional idea that the subjects of art must come from an external source:

It is not superfluous to advert to a question which has often been made, and by some has been answered in the negative, whether it be within the artist's province or not, to find or to combine a subject from himself, without having recourse to tradition or the stores of history and poetry? Why not, if the subject be within the limits of art and the combinations of nature . . . [shall] the immediate avenues of the mind, open to all its observers, from the poet to the novelist, be shut only to the artist? (Fuseli 141-142)

With this statement, Fuseli validates the internal space of the artist's mind as a source of creativity. Of course, some of the most stimulating and shocking visual images within the mind often come from frightening nightmares, and it was this sort of psychological terror that deeply interested Fuseli.

Fuseli's most well-known foray into terror within the context of dreams is undoubtedly his work *The Nightmare* (1781) [fig. 6]. In this painting, a woman in a white nightgown reclines upon a bed, arm hanging down loosely over her head. Such a scene might normally be interpreted as peaceful if it weren't for the terrifying, ghoulish creature that squats atop the sleeping woman, staring down the viewer with an evil grimace. This green, twisted figure is often described as being an incubus, or demon, and thus is presumably both personification and bringer of the nightmare the woman is experiencing.

During the Romantic period, the sex of the nightmare personification was assumed to be opposite that of the dreamer. While an incubus generally terrorized a female dreamer such as that in *The Nightmare*, male dreamers were visited instead by the female equivalent of the incubus: the succubus, also known as a *night-hag* or *night-witch* (Janson 26). Folklore scholar Katherine Mary Briggs describes the hag (or "hagge") as "one sixteenth-century name for a Night-Mare, conceived of as a hideous succubus who sat on a man in his sleep, squeezing his stomach and causing horrible dreams" (177-178). This same concept, only with an incubus rather than a

succubus, seems to ring true in the case of Fuseli's *Nightmare*, where the demonic creature physically restrains the woman by sitting upon her abdomen.

In Romantic literature, the incubus or hag was often described as riding into the nightmare on a horse, arriving to spread undue terror within the mind of the dreamer. In Fuseli's *The Nightmare*, the incubus' black mare sticks its head through the red backdrop of the curtain, white-eyed and ghostly. Contrary to popular belief, there are no direct etymological connections between the words *nightmare* and *mare*. However, horses are still prominently featured in nightmare lore with long-established symbolism involving both power and sexuality. Because horses were thought to be the preferred mode of transportation for the incubus or succubus, charms and tricks were often recommended to ward off the incubus and its horse. One example is in Robert Herrick's 1648 pamphlet "Another Charme for Stables" where he writes, "Hang up Hooks, and Sheers to scare / Hence the Hag, that rides the mare." (Feingold 56) Another connection between hags and horses lies in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* during Mercutio's description of Queen Mab, a somewhat malevolent fairy who visits people's dreams:

And in this state she gallops night by night
Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love;
.....
... This is that very Mab
That plaits the manes of horses in the night,
And bakes the elf-locks in foul sluttish hairs,
Which once untangled much misfortune bodes:
This is the hag, when maids lie on their backs,
That presses them and learns them first to bear,
Making them women of good carriage (1.4.70-95)

Fuseli's 1781 painting of *The Nightmare* was so successful and influential that he later painted at least three other versions of the work, each of them containing a horse and an incubus. In the 1790 version [fig. 7], the composition is reversed and compressed compared to the 1781 original, with the woman sloping off to the left in a more foreshortened pose. The demon in this

work also appears more directly devilish, with a fully evil smile. The horse peering through the curtain is now larger, and rather than a deep black, it is brightly highlighted in a pale white color. But despite these alterations, the same palpable feeling of dread remains, forcing the viewer to contemplate how he or she might act if placed in the woman's predicament.

Horses and nightmares continue to play a part in many of Fuseli's other works. In *The Nightmare Leaving the Chamber of Two Women* (1793) [fig. 8], Fuseli presents what is almost a follow-up scene to that of *The Nightmare*. In the painting, two women are shown reclining in a similar way to the figure in *The Nightmare*. However, the woman on the right appears to have just woken from a dream, staring groggily around the room. On the left side of the composition, a horse can be seen departing through an open window, its frantic rider silhouetted as a monstrous, pointy-eared creature. The flying horse shares its pale, hypnotic gaze with the black mare in *The Nightmare*, and there is little doubt that Fuseli meant for the two works to be both stylistically and thematically connected (Feingold 57-58).

Furthermore, in Fuseli's *Titania Awakening* (1785-90) [fig. 9], Fuseli illustrates a scene from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that thoroughly contrasts light and carefree dreams with the more sinister world of dark and erotic nightmares. On the left side of the composition, the figures of Oberon and Titania are illuminated with golden light, surrounded by laughing fairies and elves who dance to the sounds of a bagpipe player. In stark difference, the right side features the character of Bottom, who is enveloped in deep shadow. Above his forehead, an impish figure brings in an incubus upon a horse, its arm raised in the same whipping gesture as the flying creature seen departing in *Nightmare Leaving the Chamber*. Another ominous aspect near Bottom is the strange, hooded creature that is positioned between his legs in a fashion that suggests he is birthing a demon. The trio of women – generally assumed to be hags

or witches – sitting to Bottom’s left are also unsettling; one of them even appears to be nursing a demonic infant at her breast. Queen Mab on her mare also makes an appearance at the top of this overall composition, lending further reference to both dreams and Shakespeare himself.

Fuseli’s *The Night-Hag Visiting Lapland Witches* [fig. 10] presents what is probably his most complicated vision of the hag and the nightmare. The scene itself is based on a portion of John Milton’s epic poem *Paradise Lost* (1667), which was very influential on Fuseli’s art. A sleeping baby boy lies in the foreground of the composition. However, the baby’s calm and oblivious manner does not at all match the rest of his surroundings. A large witch squats next to the child, and around the pair of figures swarms an animated group of witches and demons. They all appear to be preparing to sacrifice the child, as one of the hands in the foreground brandishes a large, pointed knife. Yet, the main witch seems distracted from the task, gazing up towards the sky where a glowing figure blazes through the darkness. This figure appears to be riding a flying mount (possibly a horse, based on its front legs) and is swooping in upon the group of witches. To the left of the flying figure, a group of nine canines looks back from mid-air as though following its command. One of the oldest definitions of “nightmare” is sometimes described as a “mounted supernatural hag, scouring the countryside with nine demons as her offspring” (Briggs 177). This definition alone clearly matches the scene in Fuseli’s painting, and these ties are further established within the Milton text to which the painting refers: In *Paradise Lost*, Milton draws a parallel between the night-hag or nightmare’s nine demons and the “Hell hounds that surround Sin . . . and live in her womb” (Feingold 57). Thus, in *The Night-Hag*, Fuseli is interpreting Milton’s personification of the night-hag while using his own unique visual manner to highlight the fear and terror of this nightmarish scene.

Furthermore, the infant boy's positioning, reclining with one arm overhead, is quite similar to that of the sleeping woman in *The Nightmare*. According to art historian Lawrence Feingold, this pose has been traditionally used in Western art to signify sleep and dreaming (58). However, this particular pose also holds a more disconcerting connotation: the bubonic plague. One of the most well-known paintings regarding the plague is Nicolas Poussin's *The Plague of Ashdod* (1630-31) [fig. 11]. Fuseli's positioning of the infant in *The Night-Hag* is nearly identical to that of the dead infant boy in the foreground in *The Plague of Ashdod*. Likewise, the pose of the dead mother to the right of that baby mirrors the pose of Fuseli's dreaming woman in *The Nightmare*. Writes Sheila Barker in "Poussin, Plague, and Early Medicine":

[the dead mother has] raised the right arm away from the body, as if to avoid contact with the inflamed, tumescent, and pus-filled lymph glands in the armpit area. Artists had been using this gesture in religious plague imagery since the Renaissance as a means of discreetly alluding to [the plague]. (663)

It is unknown whether Fuseli purposefully included this reference to *The Plague of Ashdod* or to the "plague pose" in general, but the likeness of Fuseli's and Poussin's respective figures is apparent. Either way, this potential second layer of meaning injects even more horror and mystery into Fuseli's nightmarish scenes, including the complex *Night-Hag*.

Finally, it is important to note the sexual overtones in *The Night-Hag*. Nightmares typically have some component of sexuality, especially with the folk legend that incubi and succubae sexually assault unsuspecting dreamers in their beds (Feingold 58). This idea continued into early modern psychological theory, with psychoanalyst Ernest Jones stating in his 1931 work *On the Nightmare*, "All the beliefs about the Nightmare, in whatever guise, proceed from the idea of a sexual assault which is both wished for and dreaded" (319). And indeed, Fuseli's positioning of the women in *The Nightmare* and *Nightmare Leaving the Chamber* denotes sleep, but the same pose also comes with implications of eroticism and sexual vulnerability, much like

the sleeping Saint Teresa in Bernini's *Ecstasy* (1647-1652). The women in these paintings might be experiencing terror within their dreams, but there is also a sense of pleasure lurking underneath, complicating the overall emotion within these works.

In *The Nightmare*, writes Fuseli scholar Nicolas Powell, "there can be little doubt that the girl . . . is experiencing an imaginary sexual assault" (60). But in *The Night-Hag*, the sexual aspects are more perverse. The assaulted figure is not an adult but an infant, and consequently the sacrificial knife in the foreground carries "connotations of castration as well as death" (Feingold 59). The fact that the witch is spreading the legs of the child furthers this theory. Lastly, the hair plaît hanging between her breasts, with its "phallic and fetishistic form," echoes the sharpness of knife while also adding a third component of sexuality (Feingold 59).

Castration seems to have fascinated Fuseli, especially the idea of women castrating young boys. He has several later drawings with the same theme, some of which are more explicit than *The Night-Hag* with a more overt tone of sadism (Feingold 59). Interestingly, castration is also relevant to modern psychoanalytic theory about nightmares. According to Ernest Jones, "The original fear [about the nightmare] must have been that of being killed, *i.e.* castrated, by the dreaded nightly visitor" (263). Jones based much of his psychological theory on the same European folk legends and literary themes that so intrigued Fuseli concerning nightmares, incubi and succubae, and witchcraft. Thus, Fuseli was truly ahead of his time in creating psychologically impactful work such as *The Night-Hag* and *The Nightmare* that connected these themes with the realm of sexual deviance (Feingold 60).

In producing such complex and provocative work, Fuseli maintained a controversial reputation throughout his career in England. Critical opinions on his work were divisive, with some critics viewing his work as representing "genuine visual power and intellectual effect" but

others regarding it as childish, shallow, and promoting “showiness” (Myrone 290). Often, these attitudes were combined to criticize the paradox of Fuseli’s work as well as his personality, arguing that Fuseli was at once “both great painter and charlatan, genius and fool” (Myrone 290). Overall, Fuseli’s artistic vision can be most aptly categorized as exhibiting what Martin Myrone calls the “Gothic spectacle.”

The concept of the Gothic spectacle draws partially from cultural aspects that were influencing Romantic novels and poetry during Fuseli’s time—what we today call Gothic literature. These writings were often regarded, like Fuseli’s artworks, as being paragons of “libertine” ideals with questionable morals, dramatic romance, and a very dark aesthetic quality (Myrone 292). The goal of the Gothic spectacle was to create an immersive sense of the imagination and the terrors that might lie beneath the surface. Essentially, it evoked the lightness of dreams and the darkness of nightmares as they might occur within reality, shockingly and without warning. A few technological advances of the period were also critical in creating this mood of fantasy, particularly the advent of “devices of wonder” such as magic lanterns, projectors, and transparencies. These devices were used to generate images of fantasy and imagination upon a screen to entertain and terrify audiences, complete with lighting effects that were revolutionary at the time.

And in terms of fear and horror, one cannot forget the Phantasmagoria theater phenomenon, which used these projection technologies to present frightening images of monsters and nightmares that catered directly to the Gothic inclination toward horror and fantasy (Myrone 294). Upon viewing a Phantasmagoria show, poet Henry Lemoine penned “The Phantasmagoria” in an effort to connect the supernatural effects he had witnessed with popular motifs from a

variety of sources, including literature and fairytales. Not coincidentally, many of these same themes appear frequently in Fuseli's work. Writes Lemoine:

Such are the forms Phantasmagoria shows,
And such the dread which round us glows,
As when the weary limbs repose in sleep,
What wild fantastic forms their vigils keep,
Men, Devils, Angels, unconnected train,
Compose the motley visions of the brain,
Until the purple blush of day appears,
And chases from our brows nocturnal fears,
The busy scenes from their usual brightness wear,
And the false dreams dissolve in shapeless air. (Quoted in Myrone 294)

As though inside a Phantasmagoria show, Fuseli's work presents the illusion of dreams and magic as a way to remove oneself from reality and immerse oneself in the fantastic—but only temporarily. While Fuseli's paintings often contain dark scenes of terror and confusion, there is still a small but pervasive sense of unreality and theatrics, as though one is merely watching a stage play. Writes Myrone, "Fuseli's 'magic' did not consist of sheer technical effect or even require the full extent of his imagination: it exerted a magical influence on viewers, who were obliged to exercise their own imaginations" (309).

Fuseli approached the imagination as a realm of fantasy and drama separate from reality, which he largely regarded as uninspiring. But, an alternative approach would be to depict the nightmares that exist *within* reality and the psychological horrors and monsters that are largely a result of real-world events. This terror is not at all temporary but rather firmly rooted in reality (or at least what seems like reality). Without any doubt, the Romantic artist who pushed this representation of horror, tragedy, and the grotesque to its true limit was the pivotal Spanish artist Francisco Goya (1746-1828).

Though he was always sensitive to the liberal ideals of the Enlightenment, Goya's early work as a tapestry designer and court painter for the Spanish royal family had a tendency to

romanticize or downplay the struggles of the underprivileged working class. But after having been stricken deaf from illness at age forty-six, Goya's work underwent a drastic shift in both style and content compared to the previous work that had brought him fame. His paintings and prints became more overtly critical of Spanish society during the early 1800s, which underwent tumultuous political change with the invasion of Napoleon in 1807. With his country embroiled in political upheaval and his mental and physical faculties quickly deteriorating, Goya's work grew increasingly darker with an understandable penchant for both pessimism and horror.

Much of Goya's art depicted the tragedies Spain experienced during the Peninsular War (1808-1814) in which Napoleon's army invaded and seized control over Goya's country. His 1814 painting *The Second of May 1808* [fig. 12] and its companion *The Third of May 1808* [fig. 13] show the Spanish rebellion against the French occupiers and the subsequent massacre of said rebels. Likewise, his *Disasters of War* series, totaling 82 prints between 1810 and 1820, featured horrifying scenes that did not sugarcoat the violence that was occurring in Spain. Goya always tried to remain objective in his recording of events, saying that the truth should "be seen and . . . shown to others; including those who have no wish to see it." Goya went on to state that if "the blind in spirit stay their eyes on the outward aspect of things, then these outward aspects must be twisted and deformed until they cry out what they are trying to say" (Abbruzzese 124-125). In essence, Goya is advocating for the outward expression of inner turmoil as a means of spreading awareness and gathering compassion for the horrors the world is experiencing.

Although the aforementioned works were relatively realistic, many of Goya's other paintings and prints were more allegorical and fantastical, using monsters, demons, and macabre images straight from Goya's imagination to illustrate these horrific truths. According to art historian Jean Clay, Goya's work becomes "populated with phantasmagorical figures," many of

which have the same sense of “materiality” and realness as the normal, living figures in the scene (188). Like Fuseli’s “gothic spectacle,” Goya’s work mixes reality and fantasy in order to relate the nightmarish horrors of the human experience. A primary example of this lies within Goya’s *Los Caprichos series*.

Goya’s *Caprichos* were a series of 80 prints that were first published as a collection in 1799. The word *caprichos* translates to “caprices” or “follies,” but the scenes within this series are anything but light. Rather than expressions of daily frivolity, Goya’s follies reflect a bleak and satirical view of society that depicts “the irrational circumstances in which a lack of freedom comes about” (Broeke 185). The *Caprichos* title itself was subversive, as the Roman Catholic Church (which dominated Spain) judged such caprices to be indicative of insanity or demonic possession. And indeed, Goya’s printed scenes do contain a multitude of monstrous terrors as they serve to reflect the terrors that were witnessed in reality. Critic and writer Charles Baudelaire, in his discussion of *Los Caprichos*, states the following:

[*Los Caprichos* reveal the] horrors of nature and human physiognomies [that are] weirdly animalized for the occasion . . . Goya’s great merit . . . lies in giving monstrosity the ring of truth. His monsters are born whole and sound . . . The cutting edge or seam line between the real and the fantastic is impossible to discern with certainty. (Quoted in Clay 189)

Additionally, Baudelaire goes on to describe the true nature of *Los Caprichos* with his 1857 poem “Les Phares.” In the work, Baudelaire refers to Goya’s series as not follies or caprices but as “les cauchemars,” meaning “nightmares” in French (Monleon 40).

Without doubt, the most well-known print in the *Caprichos* series is plate 43, *El sueño de la razon produce monstruos*, or *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* [fig. 14]. Though its plate number places *The Sleep of Reason* in the middle of the *Caprichos* series, there is sufficient evidence based on Goya’s preliminary sketches that the series was meant to open with this print.

However, the decision to change the order may have been influenced by the political atmosphere at the time; the illustration bears a strong resemblance to the title page of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Philosophie* (1793), a highly radical philosophical discourse that had been banned in Spain. Additionally, *The Sleep of Reason* is the only plate to contain an original title, and thus there is little doubt that it was particularly important to Goya (Monleon 21).

The Sleep of Reason is one of the first scenes in which Goya depicts the materialization of a nightmare. The print features a sleeping man who is surrounded by a host of creatures. These animals are those that are primarily nocturnal including owls, bats, and cats. The epigraph for the plate reads, "Fantasy abandoned by reason produces impossible monsters; united with reason, fantasy is the mother of the arts and the source of their wonders." In a way, this phrase seems to mirror Carus' goal of merging the scientific and fantastical in order to unlock creativity. But despite the epigraph's positivity, the overall mood of the piece is terrifying, with many of the creatures displaying malevolent expressions upon their faces.

There are two different interpretations of this piece, and much of the controversy revolves around the translation of the word *sueño* in the original title. For many people, the word translates as meaning "sleep," which gives us the most common title *The Sleep of Reason*. This interpretation also involves the sleeping figure being a writer as identified by the pen and paper beneath him on the desk. Since Classical times, writing (especially journalism) has been considered the epitome of reason and objective rationality. Therefore, when "rationality" (aka the writer) sleeps, monsters are able to "lay siege to the world of reason" and influence those who would otherwise be unsusceptible to such darkness while awake. Goya portrays this idea most clearly with the owl closest to the sleeping writer. The owl appears to be speaking into the ear of the sleeping figure, an act which introduces mischief and corruption into the writer's

unconscious mind. Writes José Monleon, “Two irreconcilable universes face one another: the kingdom of light and truth on one side, the anarchy of darkness and terror on the other” (22). The monsters influencing the writer represent all that Goya saw wrong with the superstitious and corrupt Spanish society. Thus, this scene can be read as an allegorical rendering of “the nightmare” that confronts even those journalists who wish to remain clear of biases.

Yet, there is a second reading of the work that involves a different interpretation of the title’s *sueño* as meaning “dream” rather than “sleep.” This theory also alters the identity of the sleeping man from being a journalistic writer to being either an artist or a poet. Further evidence for these changes comes from an earlier sketch for the *Sleep of Reason* that contained an inscription different from that of the final plate. This sketch reads simply “Sueño” at the top, and the legend begins with “el artista sonaño.” Unlike the ambiguous definition of *sueño*, this phrase can only be translated as “the artist dreaming” rather than “sleeping,” which would be “el artista durmiendo” (Monleon 40). Due to this double meaning, this etching also sometimes goes by the title *The Dream*, and reading the scene as *The Dream of Reason Produces Monsters* creates an interesting divergence in meaning.

Interpreting the work as showing an artist or poet while dreaming shifts the idea of dreaming and imagination from a negative meaning to one that is more positive and open-ended. Rather than decrying the “sleep” of reason, this reading of the scene actually encourages it, at least in a partial sense. An artist who is dreaming should be exploring his or her own imagination in a fantasy world separate from the rational grounds of reality. In other words, Goya is promoting the use of the artistic imagination in order to escape the “monsters” that exist in the real world. However, these same monsters, consequently, will invade one’s dreams and turn them into nightmares, but only if one turns off all reason and logic inside his or her head. Thus, in this

scene, Goya cautions against the total rationality championed by the scientific Enlightenment while simultaneously warning the viewer of the perils in abandoning all reason. This duality is complex, with the artist wrestling with either having *too much* reason or *not enough*. Writes Herwig Todts,

[Is] Goya warning us and his contemporaries about the monsters of superstition, lewdness, vanity, stupidity, corruption and abuse of power, which may rear their ugly heads if they are not shackled by reason? Or is he trying to remind us of the vanity of our belief in reason, which will fail to control the demons, urges, and lusts that we carry within ourselves? (42)

Goya's next series of prints, *Los Disparates* (1815-1823), takes the "follies" of *Los Caprichos* even further into the realm of the nightmare, transforming what might have been amusing genre scenes into "images of a sinister, fascinating beauty" (Todts 42). As Isabelle van Broeke states, "Whereas the 'enlightened' *Caprichos* are more a classically-based and playful criticism of human irrationality, his dark *Disparates* are poignant visual branchings-together of Goya's journey through the dark labyrinth of ineradicable human 'unreason'" (187). The frantic, sketchy style of the etchings creates an anxious and dark tone that is reinforced by Goya's additions of gray and black aquatint backgrounds. Along with these stylistic choices, the figures in the *Disparates* series tend to demonstrate a sheer lack of any real joy or happiness, even in scenes such as carnivals or dances that presumably should be light-hearted. *Disparate alegre* (*Cheerful Folly*) [fig. 15], for example, is anything *but* cheerful. A mixture of men and women are seen dancing and waving their arms in the air, but their smiles seem mask-like and plastered on without any real emotion at all. None of the dancers looks at another; instead, each stares off into the gaping nothingness (which is also highlighted by the complete lack of any context or background setting in the scene). What might normally be a colorful and lively scene is instead colorless, both literally and figuratively, with an eerie sense of disconnection and unreality.

Goya again plays with the viewer's sense of expectation with *Disparate de bobo* [fig. 16], also known simply as *Bobalicón*. Both of these titles roughly translate to *Folly of the Fool* or *Simpleton*. Set in what might be a circus or carnival scene (one cannot be sure), the print features a gigantic, clownish figure who stands as if lunging towards a "normally" sized man. The huge figure leers down at the man with a disconcertingly toothy grin, but his eyes are squinted as if in hatred rather than joy. In his hands, the giant holds what might be large castanets, a type of Spanish percussion instrument. Yet, in his large hands, they look more like weapons than musical tools, and the man in front of the giant looks appropriately terrified, covering himself as if to somehow hide from the giant's wrath. Behind the pair of figures spreads a dark, bleak background like in the other *Disparates* scenes. However, this one is yet more frightening due to the two pale, screaming heads that emerge from behind the giant fool—ghostly apparitions that seem straight out of a Phantasmagoria show.

Disparate de miedo (*Folly of Fear*) [fig. 17] is even more directly terrifying, showing a nightmarish scene in which a group of soldiers (some identifiable as part of Napoleon's army by their uniforms) is fighting in a field where many men have already fallen to their deaths. Others lie on the ground, possibly dying, while a few are in the process of fleeing. All of the living men in the foreground (save one) are looking back in terror, for dominating the left side of the composition is a huge, faceless figure that is shrouded in a robe. The fleeing men appear utterly terrified of this creature, though it is unclear whether it is a personification of death or of fear itself. Of note, however, is the peculiar figure who remains standing in the foreground. The figure's body appears to be human and it is clothed like its fellow soldiers, yet the face is that of some kind of animal or creature—not human in the slightest. This figure is running away from the robed figure, but it looks back not at fear/death but straight out at the viewer, causing a

distinctly unsettling feeling. The same sense of dread occurs in *Disparate de entalegados* (*The Man in Sacks*) [fig. 18]. Like *Disparate alegre*, this print lacks any setting or context, rendering it difficult to discern what exactly is occurring within the scene. The print shows a group of figures who are tied up in large white sacks. Only the figures' heads are emerging from the bags, which are tied around their throats with rope. The stark, objectless black background is disturbing, and one fears for the fate of these figures, whatever it may be.

Although these *Disparates* scenes might not directly reference dreams, the fearful horrors that occur inside them are clearly influenced by the concept of nightmares and the imagination's separation from reality. Even toward the end of his career, dreams and nightmares continued to play an important role in Goya's work. For example, his later drawing *Mal sueño* (*Bad Dream*) (c. 1824-1828) [fig. 19] shares little of *Sleep of Reason*'s ambiguity concerning the definition of *sueño* in the title. The loose drawing, sketched with black crayon on white paper, shows a shocked man staring at a representation of his own nightmare: positioned in mid-air next to the man is his own face, eyes widened in horror as it is pecked at and devoured by a flock of birds. The title of a second drawing, *Pesadilla* (*Nightmare*) (c. 1816-1820) [fig. 20] is an even more direct reference to nightmares. The lesser-known work features a woman, still wearing her nightgown, riding along on a wild bull. A large piece of fabric (possibly her bedsheet) trails along behind her like a cape. However, rather than excitement or thrill, her face displays an expression of pure terror.

Unlike the man in *Mal sueño*, the woman in *Pesadilla* is not merely looking upon a vision of her dream. Instead, she is depicted as being inside the dream itself without any reference to her real, sleeping figure. This concept marks a departure in how dreamers were traditionally depicted in art. In many works, such as the previously discussed works by Blake

and Fuseli, the dreamer is typically shown asleep while the contents of the dream play out around his or her unconscious body. In Fuseli's *Nightmare*, for example, Fuseli includes the unconscious dreamer's body alongside the incubus and horse who appear during her nightmare, signaling to the viewer that the scene was within her imagination. Yet, in Goya's *Pesadilla*, the viewer witnesses only the nightmare itself, absent of any sleeping figure or definite separation from reality. Therefore, the viewer must make the assumption, based on the title alone, that the artwork is a direct representation of what is occurring within the unconscious mind.

In making this stylistic choice, Goya sets himself apart from certain Romantic attitudes and views regarding the depiction of dreams and their dreamers. Yet, while Fuseli's *Nightmare* differs from Goya's *Pesadilla* in this regard, in one aspect they are the same: both Fuseli and Goya were groundbreaking in their depiction of "nightmares outside of a historical or literary-inspired setting" (Todts 197). Instead of a prophetic dream scene from literature or history, both artists chose to depict the nightmares of the present day citizen. This establishes a new connection between the artist and the common man, and it also validates the emotional importance of the individual psyche, a concept which was radical at this time. Still, however revolutionary these concepts were, they would be further explored into the late 1800s—decades after these revolutionary Romantics Blake, Fuseli, and Goya had passed away.

The Romantic movement was considered nearly dead by the mid-nineteenth century, replaced instead with the fast, mechanistic vision of the burgeoning industrial world. However, there was something of a Romantic renaissance during the 1860s, growing out of opposition to the Realism movement. Strikingly similar to the landscape painting schism in the mid-1700s, the Realists of this later era wanted to depict things naturally without artistic bias while another group of more visionary artists and writers rebelled. Members of the latter group, who could

broadly be considered neo-Romantics, were more interested in “illuminating” the world with their minds and reflecting this imagination within their creative pursuits. The resurgence of the Romantic dream and the world of the inner mind was particularly notable in its associations with the writings of Charles Baudelaire. For Baudelaire, painting involves the “intrinsically expressive powers of colour” and the imagination is “an almost divine faculty that perceives . . . the intimate and secret connections between things” (Gamboni 59). This attention to the emotional qualities of color harkens back to Blake’s particular use of coloring to denote spirituality and mysticism, and his interest in using visions and dreams for creative pursuits was likewise reflected in the practices of these neo-Romantic artists and writers.

In addition to Baudelaire, Victor Hugo (French, 1802-1885) likewise had a profound effect on the resurgence of Romantic ideals. Hugo devoted much of his work to exploring ambiguous states that “feature an encounter between the real and the imaginary” (Gamboni 58). The connection between Hugo’s novels (which include *Les Misérables* and *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*) and the genre of Gothic literature is well documented, but far fewer people know that he was also a prolific artist of substantial talent. Hugo reportedly created over 4000 drawings, and while many of them feature architecture and landscapes, Hugo’s style is anything but stale and traditional. Working primarily in black and brown inks, Hugo created intensely atmospheric works that echo the dramatic contrast and nocturnal influence of previous works by Samuel Palmer. *The Dead City* (1850) [fig. 21], for example, features a grim scene of a decaying urban landscape with an expressive sky that is almost Turner-esque in its brushwork. *Ermitage Rock in an Imaginary Landscape* (1855) [fig. 22] features a shimmering, fantastic scene, with a darkly silhouetted castle facing a misty mountain from across a water-filled gorge. Finally, *Lace and Ghosts* (c. 1855-1856) [fig. 23] marks Hugo’s complete departure from naturalistic

representation, displaying an abstracted, one-eyed face floating within white space with lacy, grey tendrils spiraling outward. This work is eerily ahead of its time, as it more greatly resembles the avant-garde works that were to come in the early twentieth century as opposed to those that appeared in the movements preceding Hugo, including the earlier Romantics. Yet, in all three of these works, Hugo clearly allows his imagination to reign free, experimenting with his depictions of both reality and unreality.

Along with the imagination, the related idea of the fantastic experienced a renewal of interest during the late nineteenth century. In an anonymous article published in *L'Art Moderne* (January 1887), the author defines “fantastic” as being separate from both “the marvelous and the supernatural,” blurring the line between reality and imaginary worlds (Gamboni 80). Thus, the fantastic also quickly blends into the concept of the haunted: ordinary places and objects tainted by otherworldly forces. Some might also describe this unsettling feeling of “hauntedness” in terms of the uncanny (or *unheimlich*), popularized later by Sigmund Freud as “the sort of fear that attaches itself to things that have long been familiar,” or “the manifestation of something that ought to remain secret and hidden” (Gamboni 80). This renewed interest in blending dreams and nightmares with reality would gather further momentum with Freud’s development of modern psychoanalysis and dream theory. But in the years before Freud, literature and art preceded modern psychology as the foremost methods of expressing the internal conflict in the psyche. Thus, the works of American writer Edgar Allan Poe, with his mysterious characters, ghostly apparitions and haunted houses, were especially influential to artists of this neo-Romantic period. Three of these artists in particular are Albert Pinkham Ryder, James Ensor, and Odilon Redon.

Albert Pinkham Ryder (American, 1847–1917) saw himself primarily as a “dream painter,” and subsequently most of his critics regarded Ryder as a “harmless [and] hopelessly romantic eccentric,” refusing to acknowledge the complexity and darkness lurking beneath the surface (Burns 222-223). But in reality, Ryder’s imagery reveals a “nightmare unfolding in the light of the moon,” with his paintings acting as portals into the psyche and “windows into the anarchic realm of the subconscious” (Burns 223). Ryder’s *The Temple of the Mind* (c. 1885) [fig. 24] lends visual form to Poe’s poem “The Haunted Palace” (which was included in Poe’s short story “The Fall of the House of Usher”). Corresponding with the poem, Ryder’s *Temple* uses symbolism to depict the doomed character of Roderick, heir to the Usher family, whose “mind becomes the abode of [inner] demons . . . who have driven out whatever bright spirits once resided there” (Burns 221). As Ryder himself stated:

The theme is Poe’s Haunted Palace . . . The finer attributes of the mind are pictured by three graces who stand in the centre of the picture . . . They are waiting for a weeping love to join them. On the left is a Temple where a cloven footed faun dances . . . in fiendish glee at having dethroned the erstwhile ruling graces. (Burns 221)

Poe’s “Haunted Palace” signifies “a mind haunted by phantoms—a disordered brain,” which follows Roderick Usher’s descent into unstable madness. Like the vulnerable subconscious, the structure in *The Temple of the Mind* stands open to attack by the monster, a “carnal creature” who presents the risk of “pollut[ing] the sacred precincts of the mind’s temple, fatally disordering its classical symmetries” (Burns 221).

The ambiguous, earthly representation of a subconscious dream in *Temple* is also unusual for the nineteenth century; conventional sleep imagery at the time still depicted the contents of dreams either among the clouds or projected above the head or body of a sleeping figure (much like Blake and Fuseli’s dreamers). In contrast, Ryder’s nightmarish scenes, such as that of *Moonlight* (1887) [fig. 25], are almost unrecognizable as dreams if judging by these conventions:

the dramatic silhouette of a small boat is buffeted along by a black sea while a “pallid full moon floats high in the opalescent heavens” (Burns 224). Where *The Temple of the Mind* symbolizes a decaying consciousness, *Moonlight* offers the next step to actually going “inside the dream” to a place “where the mind can lose its way” (Burns 224).

The Symbolist movement brought Romantic themes into the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, expanding upon the dream world of the unreal. Symbolist artists and poets eschewed the direct representation of reality, instead relying on motifs and symbols to suggest allegorical themes. Certain aspects of nature can only be experienced under “unreal” conditions such as dreams, fantasies, or ecstasy. As Symbolist scholar Hans Hofstätter defines it, the Symbolist intention is “to prove the probable existence of another reality behind or beyond the things we perceive in a conscious state” (17). Conversely, this renders Symbolist works as “ultimately inexplicable,” which is also how theorists such as Freud described the interpretation of dreams: “With the manifold meaning of symbols, dreams combine a tendency to admit of over-interpretations, to represent, in a single content, diverse and often by nature very divergent thought formations and wishful impulses” (Hofstätter 17).

Another way in which the Symbolists expressed this underlying “other” reality was in their use of mask motifs, which is yet another holdover from the earlier Romantic period (such as in Goya’s carnival and dance scenes). These masks serve two critical functions as motifs: On one hand, masks provide a layer of ambiguity between the wearer and reality, enforcing a sense of anonymity and passiveness. Yet, masks can also enforce the opposite approach, using expression to “heighten a particular emotion or mental state” (Hofstätter 21-22). James Ensor (1850-1949), a Belgian painter and printmaker, is especially known for his depictions of masks, using them so often in his works that he eventually earned the nickname “le peintre des masques” (Todts 153).

For Ensor, masks took on a new, third meaning separate from their traditional meanings. Rather than hiding or enhancing reality, Ensor's masks reversed the expression of reality back upon itself, with the grotesque facial features of the masks emphasizing and exaggerating "everything evil, malicious, corrupt, mean, and ridiculous about human beings" (Hofstätter 22). This lack of humanness and personality ultimately renders Ensor's masked figures as inherently eerie and nightmarish. In *Masks and Grotesque Figures* (1885) [fig. 26], a large ghoulish figure on the right threatens a group of much smaller figures in front of him, but their masked faces hide any horror or surprise at their plight. Instead, they reflect a doomed sense of apathy. Similarly, in *Self-Portrait with Masks* (1889) [fig. 27], Ensor paints himself looking at the viewer, surrounded entirely by the faces of masked carnival attendees. But, rather than a feeling of frivolity or joy, the scene instead conveys a sense of uneasy dread, with the masks' expressions reflecting the underlying evil of their wearers (Hofstätter 22).

Ensor's paintings and drawings can also be consistently described as "haunted," with seemingly-alive furniture and monstrous apparitions whose grotesque qualities are further enhanced by his sketchy, frantic line work and the abundant use of black. Of particular note is Ensor's drawing *The Upright Piano* (1886-1889) [fig. 28]. The work is notable for Ensor's experimentation in combining realistic studies of objects and interiors with representations of otherworldly figures and fantastic creatures (see also *Bronze Pot with Phantoms*, 1880-85 [fig. 29]) (Todts 151). *Upright Piano* started out as a simple interior view of a room containing a piano next to an open doorway with a curtain covering it. But later, Ensor added the strange two-faced head on top of the piano as well as the ghostly figure that appears in the curtained doorway. This figure is discernable only by a slight outline and difference in texture, but mostly it blends in with the space and objects around it, as though the figure emerges from nothingness.

This perplexes the viewer and begs the question of whether what is being witnessed is indeed part of reality or something out of a nightmare.

Ensor seems to share this penchant for disorienting, context-less visions with Goya, especially when comparing Ensor's work with Goya's confounding *Disparates* scenes. Ensor is known to have viewed Goya's works at the Museum of Fine Arts in Lille, France, and Goya's *Time of the Old Woman*, featuring two deathly old women dancing, was clearly influential on Ensor's more colorful 1889 painting *Old Lady with Masks* (Royal Museum). Furthermore, like the aforementioned Albert Pinkham Ryder, Ensor also displays a clear fondness for the works of Poe, with many of his works borrowing titles from Poe's oeuvre including *The Black Cat* (1886-1888), *King Pest* (1895), and *Hop-Frog's Revenge* (1898). Of the three, *The Black Cat* [fig. 30] is probably the most morbid. The work illustrates the final scene in Poe's short story of the same title, which involves police finding the remains of the narrator's wife (whom he has murdered) along with the corpse of his favorite pet cat Pluto (which he also murders) inside the basement walls of the narrator's house. The figures and structures in Ensor's depiction are translucent and faintly sketched, with the exception being the dark mass of the black cat upon the woman's head and the subsequent trail of dark blood that pours down the right side of her body. This scene also again references Ensor's mixing of reality and fantasy. And while the scene is directly taken from literature, it was the underlying emotion that Ensor, as a Symbolist, was most interested in imparting to the viewer: that sense of pure dread and dissociation into a dream-like state that might naturally result from viewing such a ghastly scene.

Finally, perhaps one of the darkest and most serious of these neo-Romantic, Symbolist artists was Odilon Redon (French, 1840-1916) who, like Ensor and Ryder, derived profound inspiration from both Goya and Poe. His work combines the grotesqueness of Goya's prints with

the haunted, ghost-like figures of Poe's stories for a very surreal, nightmare-like collection of drawings and paintings. Redon also took his work very seriously, lacking the satire or tongue-in-cheek social criticisms of many of his predecessors. Writes Herwig Todts, "Unlike the grotesques by Goya and Ensor, the work of Redon is rarely if ever comical. The bizarre creatures he portrays seem to be living astonishingly serene lives in a desolate world" (101).

Redon, like Ensor, was deeply inspired by Poe, dedicating an entire album of artwork to the author titled *À Edgar Poë* (1882). He also named quite a few prints after Poe's works, including *Le Masque de la mort rouge* [after E.A. Poe] (1882) – which references Poe's popular story "The Mask of the Red Death" (1842) – and *Les Dents (The Teeth)* [after E.A. Poe] (1883) which was inspired by Poe's 1835 short story "Berenice." The heavy, dramatic shadows in *Le Masque* [fig. 31] render the scene almost like a photographic negative. The cream-colored paper is covered mostly in black chalk with only a few glowing faces shining through the darkness. And in *Les Dents* [fig. 32], Redon exhibits a dark, unfinished style, similar to that of Ensor. This stylistic choice enhances the drama and horror unfolding within such a strange and obscure scene: a set of body-less, grinning teeth, illuminated in a bright halo of light, appear to hover in an otherworldly fashion in front of a set of bookshelves.

No context is given within these images to hint at their internal narrative. This sense of confusion is, again, quite Goya-esque, as are the themes of madness and grotesqueness within Redon's other works. In 1885, Redon published *Hommage à Goya (Homage to Goya)*, an album of six prints that he used to commemorate Goya's work and influence. The themes in the album are both very gloomy and very fantastical, and many of them reference either dreams or visions as subject matter. Redon reinforces this idea by combining the titles for each work into his own caption for the album. When this caption functions as a poem, as Redon intended, it provides an

opportunity for him to describe the details of the dream that he has also expressed through the artwork:

In my dream I saw in the sky a face of mystery,
The marsh flower, a head human and sad,
A madman in a dismal landscape,
There were also embryonic beings,
A Strange Juggler,
Upon awakening I saw the Goddess of the Intelligible with her severe and hard
profile. (Quoted in Fitzwilliam Museum)

Of the six prints, plate 4, titled *Il y eut aussi des êtres embryonnaires* (*There were also embryonic beings*) [fig. 33], is probably the strangest, with two disembodied heads floating next to the base of a simple column. However, all six prints feature the exaggerated shading, elongated forms, and inexplicable oddities that Goya employed throughout his later works such as *Los Caprichos* and *Disparates*. Goya was obsessed with death and decay and it is no coincidence that his predecessors like Ensor and Redon were similarly entranced with depicting the morbid tragedy of life that lurks underneath the cheery façade of a mundane reality.

The image of death as “the goal of life, as redemption of the soul or its dissolution in nothingness” was pervasive during the Romantic period, and it translated well into to the Symbolism movement. Death manifested itself to the Symbolists as the ultimate withdrawal from reality – a permanent state of sleep – echoing the peaceful refuge of Caspar David Friedrich’s calm depictions of cemeteries and graveyards. Also in line with the Romantics, the Symbolists were inspired by many myths and stories surrounding death, from the deaths of Ophelia and Orpheus to the Three Fates which hold the threads of life itself. Redon seems to have been especially fascinated with death in general and its connections to sleeping. In *Dream Polyp* [fig. 34] (1891), for example, he depicts the floating head of a younger child being confronted by a snake-like creature as smoky black tendrils swirl around the pair. It is as if the

creature is being birthed from the mind of the child during a dream and the monster is subsequently invading the child's reality.

Redon employs a much looser but no less effective style in what is considered one of his masterworks, *Le rêve s'est achevé par la mort* (*The dream is realized by death*) (1881) [fig. 35]. In this ambiguous scene, an unidentifiable face stares blankly up out of what might be dirt or water. Above the figure's face, the skull and leg bones of a skeleton emerge from a bright halo of light. As in *Dream Polyp*, the two figures seem at once connected to each other and also disconnected from reality. The skeleton gazes straight out at the viewer as though challenging him or her to guess what is going on.

In conclusion, the works of Ryder, Ensor, and Redon signaled a rebirth of the Romantic ideals that were once championed – and practically invented – by the likes of Blake, Fuseli, and Goya. There is little similarity between the style or facture of the artists, especially in comparing early Romantics like Blake with later Symbolists such as Redon. Goya's visionary period toward the end of his life offered a glimpse into what would later become the full-fledged movement of modernism. And Fuseli's proposition of the mystical and fantastic as an escape from reality would ultimately reverse itself, with the Symbolists arguing that depicting reality on the surface necessitates thinking into what fantasy might lie beneath. Fuseli's stylistic and compositional influence also continued into the twentieth century, with the burgeoning horror film scene (such as the 1931 film adaptation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*) taking direct inspiration from his nightmarish works, particularly from *The Nightmare*. These artists were unique in their work, yet each artist maintained a similar fascination with same themes: dreams, visions, nightmares, and how to utilize them as a force for original creation. Whether a result of political and social turmoil or branching from the depths of the artists' mind itself, these motifs dominated Romantic

and Symbolist art for nearly two hundred years. And who can blame them: how can reality ever compete with the fascinating world of our own inner minds?

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Figures

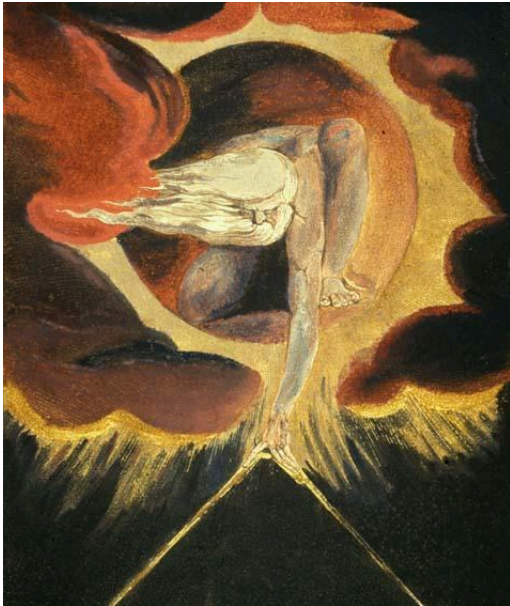


Fig. 1

William Blake, *Ancient of Days*, 1794

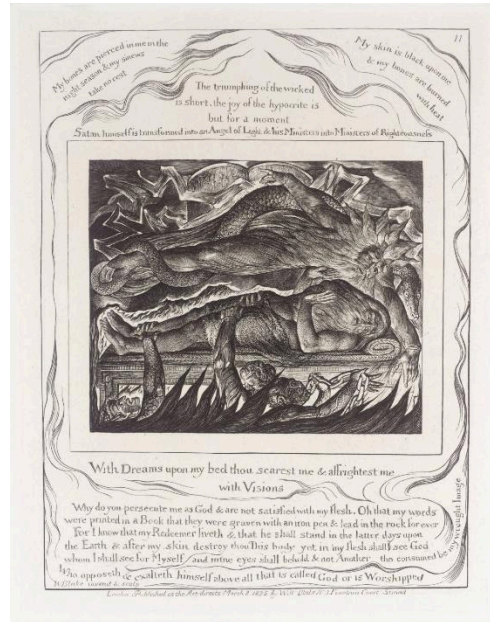


Fig. 2

William Blake, *Job's Evil Dreams*, c. 1805-1810



Fig. 3

William Blake, *The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed with the Sun*, ca. 1805-1810

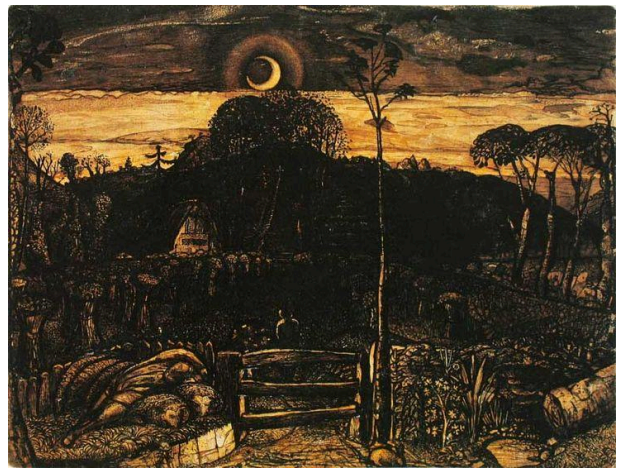


Fig. 4

Samuel Palmer, *Late Twilight*, 1825

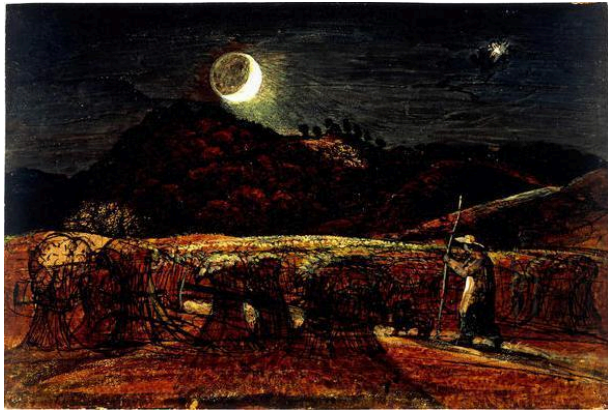


Fig. 5

Samuel Palmer, *A Cornfield by Moonlight with the Evening Star*, 1830



Fig. 6

Henry Fuseli, *The Nightmare*, 1781



Fig. 7

Henry Fuseli, *The Nightmare*, 1790



Fig. 8

Henry Fuseli, *The Nightmare Leaving the Chamber of Two Sleeping Women*, 1793



Fig. 9
Henry Fuseli, *Titania Awakening*, 1785-89

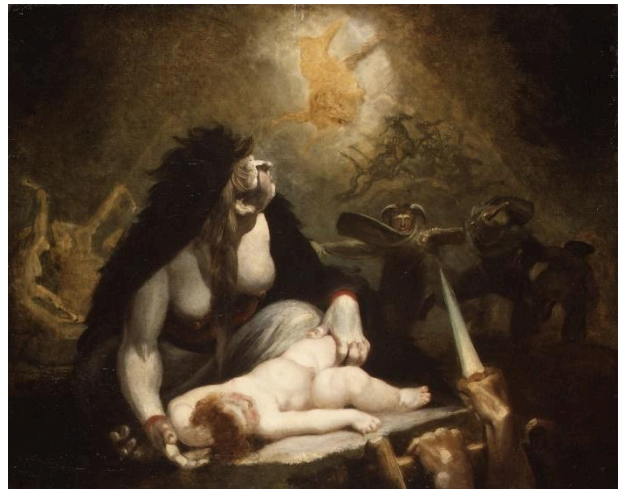


Fig. 10
Henry Fuseli, *The Night-Hag Visiting Lapland Witches*, 1796



Fig. 11
Nicolas Poussin, *The Plague of Ashdod* (detail), 1630-1631



Fig. 12
Francisco Goya, *The Second of May 1808*, 1814



Fig. 13
Francisco Goya, *The Third of May 1808*, 1814

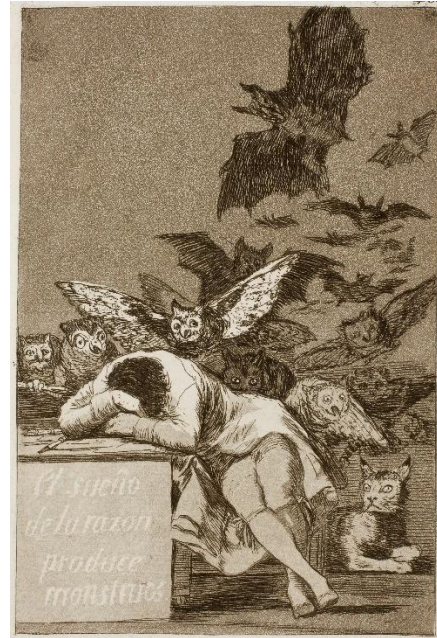


Fig. 14
Francisco Goya, *Plate 43: The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, from *Los Caprichos*, 1799



Fig. 15
Francisco Goya, *Disparate alegre (Cheerful Folly)*, from *Los Disparates*, 1815-1823



Fig. 16
Francisco Goya, *Disparate de bobo (Folly of the Fool)*, from *Los Disparates*, 1815-1823



Fig. 17

Francisco Goya, *Disparate de miedo* (*Folly of Fear*), from *Los Disparates*, 1815-1823



Fig. 18

Francisco Goya, *Disparate de entalegados* (*The Man in Sacks*), from *Los Disparates*, 1815-1823



Fig. 19

Francisco Goya, *Mal sueño* (*Bad Dream*), c. 1824-1828



Fig. 20

Francisco Goya, *Pesadilla* (*Nightmare*), c. 1816-1820



Fig. 21
Victor Hugo, *The Dead City*, 1850

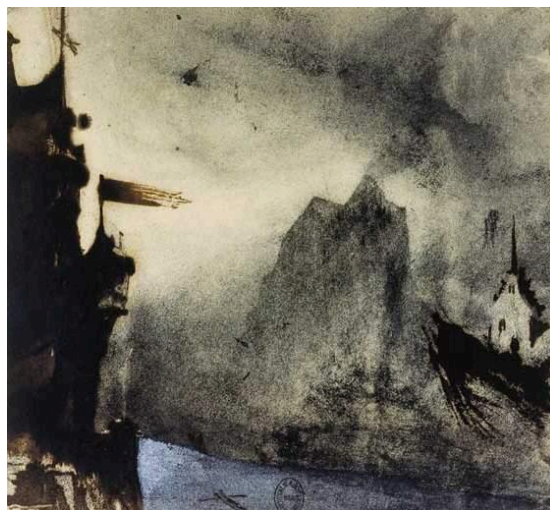


Fig. 22
Victor Hugo, *Ermitage Rock in an Imaginary Landscape*, 1855

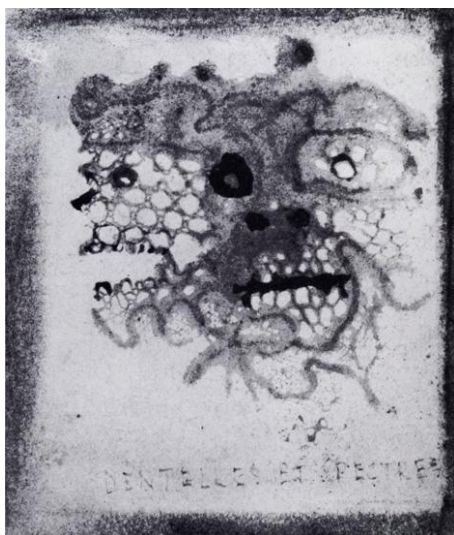


Fig. 23
Victor Hugo, *Lace and Ghosts*, c. 1855-1856

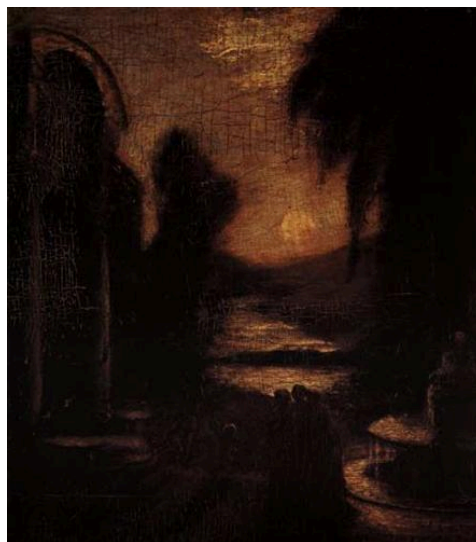


Fig. 24
Albert Pinkham Ryder, *The Temple of the Mind*, c. 1855



Fig. 25
Albert Pinkham Ryder, *Moonlight*, 1887



Fig. 26
James Ensor, *Masks and Grotesque Figures*, 1885

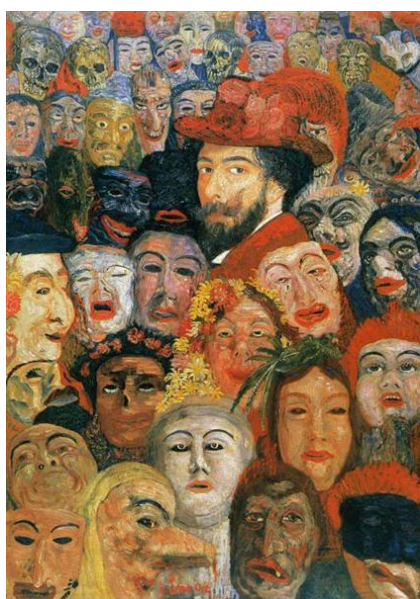


Fig. 27
James Ensor, *Self-Portrait with Masks*, 1889



Fig. 28
James Ensor, *The Upright Piano*, 1886-1889



Fig. 29
James Ensor, *Bronze Pot with Phantoms*,
1880-1885

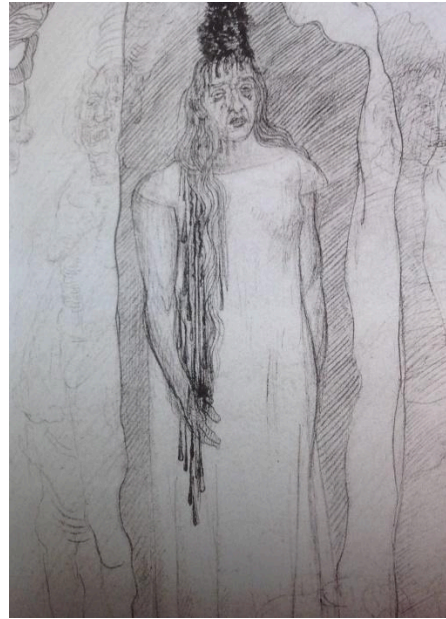


Fig. 30
James Ensor, *The Black Cat*, 1888



Fig. 31
Odilon Redon, *Le Masque de la mort rouge* (*The Mask of the Red Death*) [after E.A. Poe], 1882

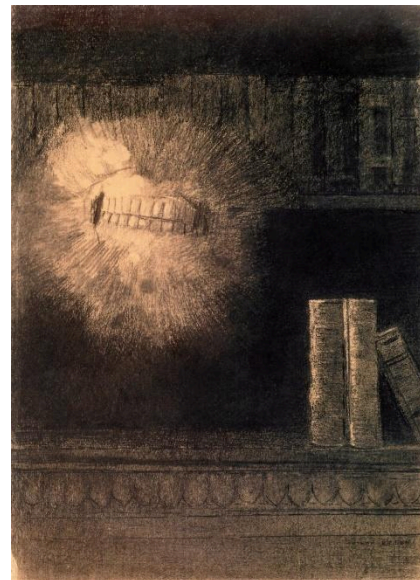


Fig. 32
Odilon Redon, *Les Dents* (*The Teeth*) [after E.A. Poe], 1883

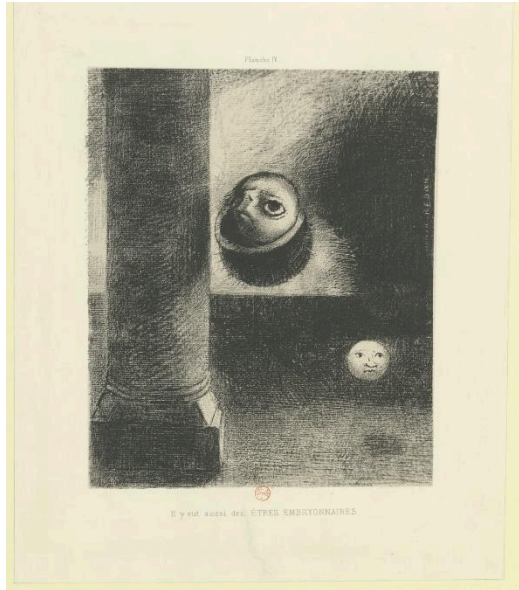


Fig. 33

Odilon Redon, *Il y eut aussi des êtres embryonnaires*
(*There were also embryonic beings*) from *Hommage à Goya*, 1885



Fig. 34

Odilon Redon, *Dream Polyp*, 1891



Fig. 35

Odilon Redon, *Le rêve s'est achevé par la mort*
(*The dream is realized by death*), 1881