Early Modern English Reading Group:

**Dreams, Nightmares, and Insomnia**

**A.** George Chapman, *Skia nyktos. The shaddow of night containing two poetical hymnes* (1594)

A stepdame Night of minde about us clings,
Who broodes beneath her hell obscuring wings,
Worlds of confusion, where the soule defamde,
The bodie had bene better never framde,
Beneath thy soft, and peace-full covert then,
(Most sacred mother both of Gods and men)
Treasures unknowne, and more unprisde did dwell;
But in the blind borne shadow of this hell,
This horrid stepdame, blindnesse of the minde,
Nought worth the sight, no sight, but worse then blind,
A Gorgon that with brasse, and snakie brows,
(Most harlot-like) her naked secrets shows
[…]
the souldier to the field,
States-men to counsell, Judges to their pleas,
Merchants to commerce, mariners to seas:
All beasts, and birds, the groves and forrests range,
To fill all corners of this round Exchange,
Till thou (deare Night, o goddesse of most worth)
Let[e]st thy sweet seas of golden humor forth
And Eagle like dost with thy starrie wings,
Beate in the foules, and beasts to Somnus lodgings,
And haughtie Day to the infernall deepe,
Proclaiming scilence studie, ease, and sleepe.
All things befor[e]ly f[o]rces put in rout,
Retiring where the morning fir’d them out.
So to the chaos of our first descent,
(All dayes of honor, and of vertue spent)
We basely make retrait, and are no lesse
Then huge impolisht heapes of filthinesse.
Mens faces glitter, and their hearts are blacke,
But thou (great Mistresse of heauens gloomie racke)
Art blacke in face, and glitterst in thy heart.
There is thy glorie, riches, force, and Art;
Opposed earth, beates blacke and blewe thy face,
And often doth thy heart it selfe deface,
For spite that to thy vertue-famed traine,
All the choise worthies that did ever raigne
In eldest age, were still preferd by Joue,
Esteeming that due honor to his love. (A4r-B2v)
[…]

1
Nights glorious mantle wraps in safe abodes,
And frees their neckes from seruile labors lodes:
Her trustie shadowes, succour men dismayd,
Whom Dayes deceitfull malice hath betrayd:
From the silke vapors of her Jueryport,
Sweet Protean dreames she sends of every sort:
[...]
If these be dreames, euen so are all things else,
That walke this round by heauenly sentinels:
But from Nights port of horne she greets our eyes
With grauer dreames inspir’d with prophesies,
Which oft presage to us succeeding chances,
We prooving that awake, they shew in trances.
If these seeme likewise vaine, or nothing are
Vaine things, or nothing come to vertues share:
For nothing more then dreames, with us shee findes:
Then since all pleasures vanish like the windes,
And that most serious actions not respecting
The second night, are worth but the neglecting,
Since day, or light, in anie qualitie,
For earthly uses do but serue the eye.
And since the eyes most quicke and dangerous use,
Enflames the heart, and learnes the soule abuse,
Since mournings are preferd to banquettings,
And they reach heaven, bred under sorrowes wings.
Since Night brings terror to our frailties still,
And shamelesse Day, doth marble us in ill.
All you possest with indepressed spirits,
Indu’d with nimble, and aspiring wits,
Come consecrate with me, to sacred Night
Your whole endeouers, and detest the light. (B4r-v)
B. Thomas Nashe, *The terrors of the night or, A discourse of apparitions* (1594)

And even as slime and durt in a standing puddle, engender toads and frogs, and many other unsightly creatures, so this slimie melancholy humor still still thickning as it stands still, engendreth many mishapen objects in our imaginations. Sundry times wee behold whole Armies of men skirmishing in the Ayre, Dragons, wilde beasts, bloody streamers, blasing Commets, firie strakes with other apparitions innumerable, whence have all these their conglomerate matter but from fuming meteors that arise from the earth, so from the fuming melancholly of our spleene mounteth that hot matter into the higher Region of the braine, whereof manie fearfull visions are framed. Our reason even like drunken fumes it displaceth and intoxicates, & yeelds up our intelletticke apprehension to be mocked and troden under foote, by everie false object or counterset noyse that comes neere it. Heerein specially consisteth our senses defect and abuse, that those organickall parts which to the minde are ordained embassadours, doo not their message as they ought, but by some misdiet or misconuernment being distempered, faile in their report, and deliuer up nothing but lyes and fables. […] A dreame is nothing els but a bubling scum or froath of the fancie, which the day hath left vndigested; or an after feast made of the fragments of idle imaginations. […] As for example; if in the dead of the night there be antic rumbling, knobbing, or disturbaunce neere us, wee straight dreame of warres, or of thunder. If a dogge howle, we suppose we are transported into hell, where we heare the complaint of damned ghossts. If our heads lye double or uneasie, we imagine we uphold all heavenn with our shoulders like *Atlas*. If wee bee troubled with too manie clothes, then we suppose the night mare rides us. (C2v-C4v) […]

The glasses of our sight (in the night) are like the prospective glasses one Hostius made in Rome, which represented the images of things farre greater than they were: each moate in the darke they make a monster, and everie sleight glimmering a giant. (E4r-F3v)
Richard Haydocke, *Oneirologia: or A briefe discourse of the nature of Dreames* (1605)

[the Soul] worketh then upon the Phantasie, where shee findes certaine broken and incoherent shapes and forms of thinges, *which* beeinge there imprinted imperfectly & confusedly, breed likewise a trouble[d] and distempered action called Dreaminge: The fruit wherof remaineinge (though abruptly) in ye Memorye, and recorded when wee awake, are Dreames: whose nature if I should indeavour to define, I might peradventure seeme to dreame of ye Limitation of an indefinite nature: yet insoemuch as Aristotles definition, give mee leaue to referr you to an ancient writer, whose conenteth mee at this time. ‘Somniumvi est phantasma factum a motu simulachrorum Dormientis’. A dreame is a phantasie wrought by ye motion of shapes in sleepe. The generall part of which definition is a Phantasie, yet not each, nor at all times: for there arise divers images in mens mindes wakeinge, which are moved by ye presence of ye externe object, or impression left in the Memorye. [W]hereas these are meere broken reflections of shapes in sleepe, when the outward senses are barred from ye apprehension of all sensible thinges.

As touchinge ye nature of Phantasie wee may yeeld ourselues some satisfaction from ye notation of ye name, whose theame and originall is φαντάζομαι, appareo: i.[e.] to appeare to the eie, to giue a resemblance, shadowe, or shewe of a thinge, whether really present, or but supposititiously suggested by way of delusion, as in those Spectra of the former and yet incredulous world, amongst men given over to strange illusions of the Devill: appearinge vnto them under many and monstrous shapes: beeinge soe true a Proteus & Vertumnus, yt hee can transforme himselfe into an Angell of Light. These Spectra, Ghosts, and night apparitions, as boddilesse as those which Ἀeneas was like to have swunged in hell, had hee not binne forewarned by Sybilla; or such as ye ingeniose Bacon by ye Mathemcall situation of his concave Opticke glasses projected into the aire, are therefore called Phantasticall bodyes, as set in opposition to ye true. But to our purpose none other is heere meant, then the abstracted forme of a true body taken in ye lookeinge-glasse of the Imagination. A meere immateriall thinge whether substance or accident scarce yet determined, a midle natture beetwixt a body and a spirit, not spirituall, but spiritall, as ye acutest Philosophers haue affirmed.

Now as a dreame consisteth of a Phantasie, soe is this composed of images and shapes produced by motion, without which there can bee noe dreame. Beecause if ye things appearinge were continually firme and fixed, there would bee as much coherance and reason in Dreames as in our wakeninge meditations: wheras wee finde it farre otherwise, insoemuch as it falleth out in our dreames, as when a stone is cast into ye water, from which ariseth presently a circle, which instantly beegeth an other, and yt a third, and soe more successiuely, untill it come to the banke, and soe vanisheth: soe in sleepe doth one image and forme tread upon the heele of an other, and ye latter still supplant ye former, till all ye matter of it and sleepe bee spent, and wee awaked. [W]hat kinde of motion this is, and to which of the sixe it ought to bee referred, is neyther easie to bee resolved, nor yet much matteriall to this pointe; howbeoit if it may challenge interest in anye, it must bee principally in Generation and Corruption. (52r-53r)

[…] Nowe for ye judgement of Diseases and theire critickall events from ye observation of Dreames, ye renowned Hyppocrates in ye very entrance of his booke de Insomnii: warranteth vs yt whosoe will give dilligent heede to such thinges as fall out in dreames, shall finde them to bee of great consequence to all purposes. And Galen in his booke affirmeth, yt from dreames wee may draw profitable conjectures of ye disposition of bodyes.
Such dreames then as the minde offereth by night in sleepe concerninge ye præcedent actions of ye daye, recordinge them in ye same substance, method, and order as they were donne, signifie health, because the minde perseuereth in ye actions and determinations of ye daye &c. The contrary argueth destemperature, and so much ye greater, by howe much they are more repugnant. Galen maketh mention of one whoe dreaminge yt his thigh was turned into a stone when hee waked found it strooke with a dead palsie. Some beeinge neare theire criticaledge day, dreamed they were swimminge in hot baths. In the Incubus or Nightmare ye vitall and Animal spirits are soe oppresed with ye multitude of grosse vapours, yt men thinke themselues ouerlaine by some hagge, or oppresed with some ponderous burthen. By which examples it is evident, yt ye actions of ye minde close prisoned in ye bodye in time of Sleepe (it selfe neuer sleepinge) are distorted and misled, by similitude of ye cheife swayeinge humours, nowe become exorbitant, by inequality of temper. [54v-55r]

[...] Nowe if you aske mee why men seldom walke and talke together: it is because ye Walker hath (as I take it) some sodaine, stronge, and irrationall imagination, which instigateth him, when the talker hath a rationall conceit of some answere to bee made, or question to bee demaunded. The matter of both is one, ye Animal spirit, only ye Efficient differeth: walkeinge proceedinge from an irrationall imagination agreeable to beasts: Talkinge from a tract of reason. (56v)

[...] Sleepe is a bindeing of ye Originall of ye Senses, whence all ye sensitive and intellectuall operations are hindred. Nowe this bindeinge must bee either of all, or but some of ye senses: soe that either ye eye beeinge open ye eare should bee shutt, or this free, and yt bounde &c. If they bee all æqually bounde, then must theire actions cease absolutely, and ye inward facultyes bee imperfect, whence arise dreames. Nowe this stoppage beeinge in the fountaine, all ye riuers of ye fiue senses must necessarily bee stopped alike. Wherefore in sleepe there can bee noe function of one or more senses, whiles ye others rest. (61r)
D. Pierre le Loyer, A treatise of specters or straunge sights, visions and apparitions appearing sensibly unto men (1605)

Certainly whether it bee so, that some object doth present it selfe to the sight, or not, but is onely imagined, yet it appeareth, that the partie doth perfectly and assuredly see something. And so likewise euen in wakening, it happeneth that some see Divels and dead men: and sometimes they suppose that they heare the voyce of them who[m] they once knew: and that they smell certaine sents and perfumes: yea, more then that, that many times they doe feele and touch such things, as appeareth by those which are troubled with the Inoubae and Succubae, or the Nightmare. Howbeit these imagined formes are more seldome and rarely seene, then they are either heard, smelt, or touched, because that in all the other senses, save in the sight onl[y] it is not needefull to observ[e] any more then one onely difference. And therefore one onely Spirit transferred unto the sense, together with the thing that is imagined, will very easily represent the same. But to the eyes there are many differences necessarie, as the greatnes, the forme, the colour: and therefore it must bee of necessitie, that many Spirites be transferred thereunto. Besides those Sinewes that appertaine to the eyes, nature hath made them hollow: And they only of all the other senses are so, because they haue need of many spirits in their operations. And it happeneth, that wee are sooner wearied in looking and beholding at[n]tiuely upon any thing, then we are in the using and exercising of any other of the bodily senses whatsoever. [...] That naturally, even in the sou[n]dest men, when they sleepe, the senses doe seeme to moue themselves by a locall motion of the humors, and of the blood that descendeth even to the Organs, which are sensitive and apprehensiv[e]: in such sorte, that beeing wakened, they thinke they see those very formes and Images which they dreamed of. And this happeneth often to yong persons, who of a sudden are so frighted, that they thinke they see many vaine Images and figures, that for very feare they hide themselves vnder the coverings of their beddes. But such feares doe not last nor continue long, but as soone as the partie is throughly and wel wakened, they do vanish away from the fantasie, which had before apprehended and received them vainely and falsely. (K2v-K3v) [...] Insomuch that there are found some men who in their sleep walke & go up and downe, and (which is almost incredible) doe execute all such actions as they use to doe when they are waking. With such a maladie or infirmitie were stricken, Theon, Tithoreus the Stoicke, and the servant of Pericles, of whome we reade, That the one used to walke in his sleepe: and the other did vsually in his sleepe creepe uppe to the toppe of the house, as is reported by Diogenes Laertius [...] Besides, Aristotle in his booke of Auscultations writeth, That in the Cittie of Tarentum, there was a Taverner, which in the day time did use to sell wine, and in the night would runne uppe and downe through the Towne in his sleepe, as if he hadde beeene madde or frantike, and yet would so well looke to the keeping of the keyes of his Taverne or Wine-seller, which he carried hanging at his girdle, that a many of gallants having plotted & made a match to get it from him, yet lost their labour, and were disappoynted of their purpose. Bariboius also telleth how there was a certaine man in Pisa, which in his sleepe would use to arise and arme himselfe, and to runne up and downe wandering through the towne, still talking and singing as hee went. And Marian a Doctour of the Civill Lawe writeth that there was a neighbour of his a yoong woman, that in her sleep would arise out of her bed, and bake her bread sleeping. In like sorte Laudensis writeth how hee had a companion his fellow student at Paris, an Englishman borne, who without awaking, went in the night not farre from the Church of Saint Benet neere the river of Seyne where on a time he slew a little childe, and returned thence into his lodging, and so layd him downe againe into his bed. For my owne part I have heard from Mesieur Chalvest President at Tholousa, a man
of great learning, how himselfe had sometimes a servant that would arise in his sleepe, and woulde answer very directly to any question that was demaunded of him, and after hee had clothed himselfe and put on his apparrell still sleeping, hee would not awaken for a quarter of an houre after. (O4r-v)

[…] And I say this expresly to refute the opinion of some Phisitians of our time, as namely, Baptista de Porta a Neapolitane, who doe affirme and maintaine that the sleepes of Sorcerers replenished with such vaine imaginations in dreaming, doe proceed of no other cause than of a sleepy kinde of oyntment, wherewith they doe use to annoynt themselves before they come to be ravished in those their extasies. But the trueth is, there is not any kinde of oyle, oyntment, perfume, or any other such like drugge, that hath any such power or vertue to make menne to fall asleepe, and to dreame in that manner as Sorcerers use to doe: who at the time of their awaking doe sometimes take reporte of things which fall out to be true indeede, which can bee by no other meane, than the ministery of divells, which doe shew vnto them in their sleepe and dreames, the images of things that are true and certaine, and doe withall perswade them, when they awake, that they have seene them sensibly and indeed. (II4v)
Enter a Doctor of Physic and a Waiting Gentlewoman

Doc. I have two nights watched with you, but can perceive no truth in your report. When was it she last walked?

Gent. Since his majesty went into the field, I have seen her rise from her bed, throw her nightgown upon her, unlock her closet, take forth paper, fold it, write upon’t, read it, afterwards seal it, and again return to bed; yet all this while in a most fast sleep.

Doc. A great perturbation in nature, to receive at once the benefit of sleep and do the effects of watching! In this slumbery agitation, besides her walking and other actual performances, what, at any time, have you heard her say?

Gent. That, sir, which I will not report after her.

Doc. You may to me: and ’tis most meet you should.

Gent. Neither to you nor any one; having no witness to confirm my speech.

Enter LADY MACBETH, with a taper

Lo you! here she comes. This is her very guise, and, upon my life, fast asleep. Observe her; stand close.

Doc. How came she by that light?

Gent. Why, it stood by her: she has light by her continually; ’tis her command.

Doc. You see, her eyes are open.

Gent. Ay, but their sense are shut.

Doc. What is it she does now? Look, how she rubs her hands.

Gent. It is an accustomed action with her, to seem thus washing her hands. I have known her continue in this a quarter of an hour.

Lady M. Yet here’s a spot.

Doc. Hark! she speaks. I will set down what comes from her, to satisfy my remembrance the more strongly.

Lady M. Out, damned spot! out, I say! —One; two: why, then ’tis time to do’t. —Hell is murky. —Fie, my Lord, fie! a soldier, and afeard? —What need
we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to acco\mpt? —Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him.

Doc. Do you mark that?

Lady M. The Thane of Fife had a wife; where is she now? What, will these hands ne’er be clean? No more o’that, my Lord, no more o’that. You mar all with this starting.

Doc. Go to, go to: you have known what you should not.

Gent. She has spoke what she should not, I am sure of that: heaven knows what she has known.

Lady M. Here’s the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. O! O! O!

Doc. What a sigh is there! The heart is sorely charg’d.

Gent. I would not have such a heart in my bosom, for the dignity of the whole body.

Doc. Well, well, well.

Gent. Pray God it be, sir.

Doc. This disease is beyond my practice: yet I have known those which have walk’d in their sleep, who have died holily in their beds.

Lady M. Wash your hands, put on your nightgown; look not so pale. —I tell you yet again, Banquo’s buried: he cannot come out on’s grave.

Doc. Even so?

Lady M. To bed, to bed: there’s knocking at the gate: come, come, come, give me your hand. What’s done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed. 

[Exit.]

Doc. Will she go now to bed?

Gent. Directly.

Doc. Foul whisp’rings are abroad. Unnatural deeds Do breed unnatural troubles: infected minds To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets. More needs she the divine than the physician. — God, God forgive us all! Look after her; Remove from her the means of all annoyance, And still keep eyes upon her. —So, good night:
My mind she has mated, and amaz’d my sight.
I think, but dare not speak.

Gent. Good night, good doctor.

[Exeunt.] (V.i.1-78)

F. Matthaeus Greuter, A surgery where all fantasy and follies are purged and good qualities are prescribed (1600) Wellcome Images.
ACT. 5. SCENA. 18.
_The Senses, APPETITUS and LINGUA a sleepe. PHANTASTES. COMU. SENSUS. MEMORIA. ANAMNESTES._

PHA. … my Lord, softly, softly, here’s the notablest peec of treason discovered, how say you _Lingua_. set all the Senses at odds, she hath confess it to me in her sleepe.

COM SEN. Ist possible Maister Register? did you ever know any talke in their sleepe?

MEM. I remember my Lord many have done so very oft, but women are troubled, especially with this talking disease, many of them have I heard answer in their dreames, and tell what they did all day awake.

ANAM. By the same token, there was a wanton maide, that being askt by her Mother, what such a one did with her so late one night in such a roome, she presently said, that—

MEM. Peace you wilde rake hell, is such a jest fitte for this company, no more I say sire.

PHA. My Lord will you believe your owne eares, you shall heare her answere me, as directly and truely as my be. _Lingua_, what did you with the Crowne and garments.

LING. Ile tell thee _Mendacio_.

PHA. Shee thinkes _Mendacio_ speaks to her, marke nowe, marke howe truely shee will answere: what say you Madame?

LING. I say _Phantastes_ is a foolish transparent gull; a meere fanatick nupson in my immagination not worthie to sit as a Judges assistant.

COM. SEN. Ha, ha, ha, howe truely and directly shee answeres.

PHA. Faw, faw, she dreames now she knowes not what shee saies, I trie her once againe: Madame? what remedie can you have for your greate losses?

LING. O are you come _Acrasia_? welcome, welcome, boy reach a Cushion sit downe good _Acrasia_: I am so beholding to you, your potion wrought exceedinglie, the senses were so mad, did not you see how they raged about the woods?

COM. SEN. Hum, _Acrasia_? is _Acrasia_ her confederate? my life that witch hath wrought some villany, — — —

_Lingua riseth in her sleepe, and walketh_
"How’s this? is shee a sleepe? haue you seene one walke thus before?"

MEM. It is a very common thinge, I haue seene many sicke of the Peripatetick disease.

ANA. By the same token my Lord, I knewe one that went abroad in his sleepe, bent his bowe, shot at a Magpie, kild her, fetcht his arrowe, came home, lockt the doores, and went to bed againe.

COM. SEN. What should be the reason of it?

MEM. I remember Scallger told mee the reason once, as I thinke thus: The nerves that carrie the moving faculty, from the braine, to the thighes, legges, feete, and armes, are wider farre then the other nerves, wherefore they are not so easily stopt with the vapours of sleepe, but are night and daie ready to performe what fancy shall command them.

COM. SEN. It may bee so, but Phantastes enquire more of Acrasia.

PHA. What did you with the potion Acrasia made you:

LIN. Gave it to the Senses, and made them as madde as---well, If I cannot recover it – let it goe, Ile not leave them thus.

She lies downe againe.

COM. SEN. Boy a wake the Senses there.

ANA. Hoe, hoe, Auditus, up, up, so hoe, Olfactus have at your nose, up Visus, Gustus, Tactus, up: What can you not feele a pinch? have at you with a pinne.

TAC. Oh, you stab me, oh,

COM SEN. Tactus, know you how you came hither:

TAC. No my Lord, not I, this I remember, We sup’t with Gustus, and had wine good store, Where of I thinke I tasted liberally. Amongst the rest, wee drunke a composition, Of a most dellicate, and pleasant rellish, That made our braynes, somewhat irregular.
H. William Shakespeare, *King Lear* (1606)

[Enter GLOUCESTER, with a torch.]

EDGAR This is the foul fiend Flibbertigibbet: he begins at curfew, and walks till the first cock; he gives the web and the pin, squinies the eye, and makes the hare-lip; mildews the white wheat and hurts the poor creature of earth.

Swithold footed thrice the world;  
He met the nightmare, and her nine-foal;  
Bid her alight and her troth plight,  
And, aroint thee, witch, aroint thee. (III.iv.113-120)

I. Drawing-head, Showing Cells of Brain Ventricles (1347). Illustrating the transition from the external *tactus, gustus, olfactus, auditus* and *visus*, to the internal common sense, imagination and memory. Wellcome Images.