

= The Nightmare =

The Nightmare is a 1781 oil painting by Anglo-Swiss artist Henry Fuseli (1741 ? 1825) . Since its creation , it has remained Fuseli 's best-known work . With its first exhibition in 1782 at the Royal Academy of London , the image became famous ; an engraved version was widely distributed and the painting was parodied in political satire . Due to its fame , Fuseli painted at least three other versions of the painting .

Interpretations of The Nightmare have varied widely . The canvas seems to portray simultaneously a dreaming woman and the content of her nightmare . The incubus and the horse 's head refer to contemporary belief and folklore about nightmares , but have been ascribed more specific meanings by some theorists . Contemporary critics were taken aback by the overt sexuality of the painting , which has since been interpreted by some scholars as anticipating Jungian ideas about the unconscious .

= = Description and history = =

The Nightmare simultaneously offers both the image of a dream ? by indicating the effect of the nightmare on the woman ? and a dream image ? in symbolically portraying the sleeping vision . It depicts a sleeping woman draped over the end of a bed with her head hanging down , exposing her long neck . She is surmounted by an incubus that peers out at the viewer . The sleeper seems lifeless , and , lying on her back , she takes a position believed to encourage nightmares . Her brilliant coloration is set against the darker reds , yellows , and ochres of the background ; Fuseli used a chiaroscuro effect to create strong contrasts between light and shade . The interior is contemporary and fashionable , and contains a small table on which rests a mirror , phial , and book . The room is hung with red velvet curtains which drape behind the bed . Emerging from a parting in the curtain is the head of a horse with bold , featureless eyes .

For contemporary viewers , The Nightmare invoked the relationship of the incubus and the horse (mare) to nightmares . The work was likely inspired by the waking dreams experienced by Fuseli and his contemporaries , who found that these experiences related to folkloric beliefs like the Germanic tales about demons and witches that possessed people who slept alone . In these stories , men were visited by horses or hags , giving rise to the terms " hag riding " and " mare riding " , and women were believed to engage in sex with the devil . The etymology of the word " nightmare " , however , does not relate to horses . Rather , the word is derived from mara , a Scandinavian mythological term referring to a spirit sent to torment or suffocate sleepers . The early meaning of " nightmare " included the sleeper 's experience of weight on the chest combined with sleep paralysis , dyspnea , or a feeling of dread . The painting incorporates a variety of imagery associated with these ideas , depicting a mare 's head and a demon crouched atop the woman .

Sleep and dreams were common subjects for the Zürich-born Henry Fuseli , though The Nightmare is unique among his paintings for its lack of reference to literary or religious themes (Fuseli was an ordained minister) . His first known painting is Joseph Interpreting the Dreams of the Butler and Baker of Pharaoh (1768) , and later he produced The Shepherd 's Dream (1798) inspired by John Milton 's Paradise Lost , and Richard III Visited by Ghosts (1798) based on Shakespeare 's play .

Fuseli 's knowledge of art history was broad , allowing critics to propose sources for the painting 's elements in antique , classical , and Renaissance art . According to art critic Nicholas Powell , the woman 's pose may derive from the Vatican Ariadne , and the style of the incubus from figures at Selinunte , an archaeological site in Sicily . A source for the woman in Giulio Romano 's The Dream of Hecuba at the Palazzo del Te has also been proposed . Powell links the horse to a woodcut by the German Renaissance artist Hans Baldung or to the marble Horse Tamers on Quirinal Hill , Rome . Fuseli may have added the horse as an afterthought , since a preliminary chalk sketch owned by his biographer did not include it . Its presence in the painting has been viewed as a visual pun on the word " nightmare " and a self-conscious reference to folklore ? the horse destabilises the painting 's conceit and contributes to its Gothic tone .

= = = Exhibition = = =

The painting was first shown at the Royal Academy of London in 1782 , where it " excited ? an uncommon degree of interest " , according to Fuseli 's early biographer and friend John Knowles .

The painting is owned and currently on display at the Detroit Institute of Arts .

It remained well @-@ known decades later , and Fuseli painted other versions on the same theme . Fuseli sold the original for twenty guineas , and an inexpensive engraving by Thomas Burke circulated widely beginning in January 1783 , earning publisher John Raphael Smith more than 500 pounds . The engraving was underscored by a short poem by Erasmus Darwin , " Night @-@ Mare " :

Darwin included these lines and expanded upon them in his long poem *The Loves of the Plants* (1789) , for which Fuseli provided the frontispiece :

= = Interpretation and legacy = =

Contemporary critics often found the work scandalous due to its sexual themes . A few years before he painted *The Nightmare* , Fuseli had fallen passionately in love with a woman named Anna Landholdt in Zürich , while he was travelling from Rome to London . Landholdt was the niece of his friend , the Swiss physiognomist Johann Kaspar Lavater . Fuseli wrote of his fantasies to Lavater in 1779 :

Last night I had her in bed with me ? tossed my bedclothes hugger @-@ mugger ? wound my hot and tight @-@ clasped hands about her ? fused her body and soul together with my own ? poured into her my spirit , breath and strength . Anyone who touches her now commits adultery and incest ! She is mine , and I am hers . And have her I will . ?

Fuseli 's marriage proposal met with disapproval from the woman 's father , and in any case Fuseli 's love seems to have been unrequited ? Landholdt married a family friend soon after . The *Nightmare* , then , can be seen as a personal portrayal of the erotic aspects of love lost . Art historian H. W. Janson suggests that the sleeping woman represents Landholdt and that the demon is Fuseli himself . Bolstering this claim is an unfinished portrait of a girl on the back of the painting 's canvas , which may portray Landholdt . Anthropologist Charles Stewart , in his study of erotic dreams and nightmares , characterises the sleeping woman as " voluptuous , " and one scholar of the Gothic describes her as lying in a " sexually receptive position . " In *Woman as Sex Object* (1972) , Marcia Allentuck similarly argues that the painting 's intent is to show female orgasm . This is supported by Fuseli 's sexually overt and even pornographic private drawings (e.g. , *Symplegma of Man with Two Women* , 1770 ? 78) . Fuseli 's painting has been considered representative of sublimated sexual instincts . Related interpretations of the painting view the incubus as a dream symbol of male libido , with the sexual act represented by the horse 's intrusion through the curtain . Fuseli himself provided no commentary on his painting .

The Royal Academy exhibition brought Fuseli and his painting enduring fame . The exhibition included Shakespeare @-@ themed works by Fuseli , which won him a commission to produce eight paintings for publisher John Boydell 's Shakespeare Gallery . One version of *The Nightmare* hung in the home of Fuseli 's close friend and publisher Joseph Johnson , gracing his weekly dinners for London thinkers and writers . The *Nightmare* was widely plagiarised , and parodies of it were commonly used for political caricature , by George Cruikshank , Thomas Rowlandson , and others . In these satirical scenes , the incubus afflicts subjects such as Napoleon Bonaparte , Louis XVIII , British politician Charles James Fox , and Prime Minister William Pitt . In another example , admiral Lord Nelson is the demon , and his mistress Emma , Lady Hamilton , the sleeper . While some observers have viewed the parodies as mocking Fuseli , it is more likely that *The Nightmare* was simply a vehicle for ridicule of the caricatured subject . The Danish painter , Nicolai Abraham Abildgaard , whom Fuseli had met in Rome , produced his own version of *The Nightmare* (Danish : *Mareridt*) which develops on the eroticism of Fuseli 's work . Abildgaard 's painting shows two naked women asleep in the bed ; it is the woman in the foreground who is experiencing the

nightmare and the incubus ? which is crouched on the woman 's stomach , facing her parted legs ? has its tail nestling between her exposed breasts .

Fuseli painted other versions of The Nightmare following the success of the first ; at least three other versions survive . The other important canvas was painted between 1790 and 1791 and is held at the Goethe Museum in Frankfurt . It is smaller than the original , and the woman 's head lies to the left ; a mirror opposes her on the right . The demon is looking at the woman rather than out of the picture , and it has pointed , catlike ears . The most significant difference in the remaining two versions is an erotic statuette of a couple on the table .

= = = Influence on literature = = =

The Nightmare likely influenced Mary Shelley in a scene from her famous Gothic novel Frankenstein , or , The Modern Prometheus (1818) . Shelley would have been familiar with the painting ; her parents , Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin , knew Fuseli . The iconic imagery associated with the Creature 's murder of the protagonist Victor 's wife seems to draw from the canvas : " She was there , lifeless and inanimate , thrown across the bed , her head hanging down , and her pale and distorted features half covered by hair . " The novel and Fuseli 's biography share a parallel theme : just as Fuseli 's incubus is infused with the artist 's emotions in seeing Landholdt marry another man , Shelley 's monster promises to get revenge on Victor on the night of his wedding . Like Frankenstein 's monster , Fuseli 's demon symbolically seeks to forestall a marriage .

Edgar Allan Poe may have evoked The Nightmare in his short story " The Fall of the House of Usher " (1839) . His narrator compares a painting hanging in Usher 's house to a Fuseli work , and reveals that an " irrepressible tremor gradually pervaded my frame ; and , at length , there sat upon my heart an incubus of utterly causeless alarm " . Poe and Fuseli shared an interest in the subconscious ; Fuseli is often quoted as saying , " One of the most unexplored regions of art are dreams " .

Armin Greder references " The Nightmare " in his children 's book " The Island " (2007) in the second panel of the double page spread across pages 17 and 18 .

= = = In the twentieth and twenty @-@ first centuries = = =

Fuseli 's Nightmare reverberated with twentieth @-@ century psychological theorists . In 1926 , American writer Max Eastman paid a visit to Sigmund Freud and claimed to have seen a print of The Nightmare displayed next to Rembrandt 's The Anatomy Lesson in Freud 's Vienna apartment . Psychoanalyst and Freud biographer Ernest Jones chose another version of Fuseli 's painting as the frontispiece of his book On the Nightmare (1931) ; however , neither Freud nor Jones mentioned these paintings in their writings about dreams . Carl Jung included The Nightmare and other Fuseli works in his Man and His Symbols (1964) .

Tate Britain held an exhibition titled Gothic Nightmares : Fuseli , Blake and the Romantic Imagination between 15 February and 1 May 2006 , with Fuseli 's Nightmare as the central exhibit . The catalogue indicated the painting 's influence on films such as the original Frankenstein (1931) and The Marquise of O (1976) . Among modern artists , Balthus appears to have incorporated elements of The Nightmare in his work (e.g. , The Room , 1952 ? 54) .

Ken Russell 's Gothic (film) - 1986 features various interpretations of Nightmare as a central theme .

The 1993 Computer Game The 7th Guest features this painting in an animated form where the succubus repeatedly stabs the woman with a dagger while crouched on her stomach .

On 7 November 2011 Steve Bell produced a cartoon with Angela Merkel as the sleeper and Silvio Berlusconi as the monster .

The 2011 film The Twilight Saga : Breaking Dawn - Part 1 displays the painting in a sequence where Edward Cullen researches demon children on the Internet .

In Season 2 , episode 3 of the BBC television show The Fall (aired November 27 , 2014 on BBC

Two) , Paul Spector sets a digital image of the painting as the wallpaper for DSI Stella Gibson 's laptop when he breaks into her room . A printed copy of the painting also appears in season 2 episode 4 (aired December 4 , 2014 , on BBC Two) , as evidence under investigation .

In season 7 , episode 35 of Cartoon Network 's " Adventure Time " (aired May 26 , 2016) , the character Prince Gumball is portrayed as the woman in this painting . It is shown as imagery during a personal conversation with Butterscotch Butler .