

HENRY FUSELI'S *THE NIGHTMARE*:  
AN EXAMINATION OF THE RECENT SCHOLARSHIP

by

MELANIE DAVISON

(Under the Direction of Alisa Luxenberg)

ABSTRACT

During his lifetime, Henry Fuseli gained great fame for his painting *The Nightmare*; however, his art fell largely into obscurity during the nineteenth century. It wasn't until the twentieth century when some critics perceived a kinship between Surrealist ideas and goals and Fuseli's work that the artist reemerged into artistic discourse. From this point, artists and art historians examined Fuseli's masterwork, *The Nightmare*, in order to understand how the artist and his painting fit with practices and perspectives of his contemporaries and what made him stand apart. This paper will examine the scholarship about Fuseli's painting and how it has affected our interpretation of the work of art while also allowing us to see the perspectives and interests of the scholars themselves.

INDEX WORDS: Henry Fuseli, The Nightmare, Scholarship, Review, Reception

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MELANIE DAVISON

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MELANIE DAVISON

Major Professor: Alisa Luxenberg

Committee: Janice Simon  
Nell Andrew

Electronic Version Approval:

Suzanne Barbour  
Dean of the Graduate School  
The University of Georgia  
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## CHAPTER 1

### An Introduction to Fuseli's Legacy

Henry Fuseli's painting, *The Nightmare*, (fig. 1) first appeared in the 1782 Royal Academy summer exhibition in London which admitted 55,357 visitors to its showcase.<sup>1</sup> The periodical reviews of the painting following the exhibition showed that critics were puzzled by the canvas, unsure of how to read or interpret it, and questioning whether it conformed to the standards of taste. This tumultuous beginning foreshadowed Fuseli's precarious position in art history, for *The Nightmare* and Fuseli's oeuvre as a whole fell largely into obscurity within high art discourse through the nineteenth century, "lost" until 1942.

*The Nightmare* reemerged with the attention of the avant-garde in the twentieth century when some critics saw it as a psychological precursor to Surrealist art.<sup>2</sup> After this initial interest in finding a relationship between Fuseli's painting and Surrealism, a common argument persisted within the twentieth-century scholarship that followed: that *The Nightmare* was firmly planted in the practices and aesthetic ideals of its time and should not be read as a precursor to avant-garde art. In order to refute the perception that the painting was a "proto-Surrealist" work, scholars sought to address the painting in terms of its contemporary [framework of] culture and aesthetics. This argument also counterbalanced early criticism of the painting which was often ambivalent, questioning

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Frayling, "Fuseli's *the Nightmare*: Somewhere between the Sublime and the Ridiculous," in *Gothic Nightmares : Fuseli, Blake and the Romantic Imagination* (London: Tate Publishing, 2006), 23.

<sup>2</sup> H. W. Janson, "Fuseli's Nightmare," *Arts and sciences*. 2, no. 1 (1963): 23.

whether it fit the late eighteenth-century requirements of fine art and taste.<sup>3</sup> If the painting was not a proto-Surrealist work, twentieth-century scholars had to prove how *The Nightmare* fit into art historical traditions and expectations of eighteenth-century fine art. This concern led to scholars' attempts to downplay how the painting differed from the art of its time.

Through an exploration of the scholarly literature on *The Nightmare*, I will trace the shifts in scholarship and how these shaped and changed an understanding of the painting, but also reflect the perspectives and ideologies of the scholars interpreting the work. To examine this relationship between the viewer and the work of art, I will incorporate some of the ideas of reception theory, as proposed by Wolfgang Kemp in his 1998 article "The Work of Art and Its Beholder: The Methodology of the Aesthetic of Reception".<sup>4</sup> Kemp argues that "Before the dialogue between work and beholder can even begin to transpire, both are already caught in prearranged interpretive spheres."<sup>5</sup> These interpretative spheres include both extrinsic and intrinsic conditions. Extrinsic conditions include such factors as the location and atmosphere in which the viewer experiences the work of art, or any changes or restorations made to the art object. Intrinsic conditions include the original medium of the work of art and the artist's

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<sup>3</sup> Frayling, 11; During the late eighteenth century, fine art was supposed to present technical skill and serve a moralizing purpose. The critical response to *The Nightmare* varied in opinion as to what degree Fuseli met the requirements of both aspects of fine art. According to Sir Joshua Reynolds's *Discourses on Art*, it was the role of the artists to raise the thoughts of the viewer through refined art portraying morally elevated themes and events.

<sup>4</sup> Wolfgang Kemp, "The Work of Art and Its Beholder," in *The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Mark A. Cheetham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 180-196.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 184. Kemp discusses that for many approaches of reception theory, attempting to recreate the original location and setting of the work of art is important to examining the different responses viewers have to the art, but he also acknowledges that this cannot always be achieved. In the case of *The Nightmare*, we do not have the information to recreate the original exhibition setting for viewing the painting.

purpose and vision for the piece as well as the perspectives and preconceptions brought by the viewer. To garner the greatest understanding of the relationship between the “text” or work of art and the “context” in which it is experienced, Kemp asserts that it is important “not to evaluate the work of art one-sidedly under the conditions of just its first and latest appearance, but to follow work and context throughout the history that they have mutually created.”<sup>6</sup> Within this paper, I will examine this history of *The Nightmare* through its reception in artistic discourse. By studying how the work has been received and interpreted, I will demonstrate how the meaning and effect of the original work have been expanded beyond the canvas to serve as an icon for the larger perception of the painting and the artist who created it.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 185.



## CHAPTER 2

### Visual Analysis

*The Nightmare* presents a dark and domestic interior scene. The central objects are highlighted as though a spot light is pointed at them and the edges are dark and shadowed creating a largely undefined space. At the center of the 101.6 cm by 127 cm canvas lies a female figure in a supine position across a disheveled bed. She appears unconscious with her head tilted over the side of the bed and left arm draping limply to the floor. On top of the woman sits a shadowy brown goblin-like creature. His placement on the woman's diaphragm indicates that he is an incubus, a male mythological creature who sits on sleeping female victims and causes the suffocating feeling then associated with sleep paralysis and nightmares.<sup>7</sup> Behind them to the left, a dark horse's head with large eyes peers in at the incubus from behind a heavy red curtain.

The scene displays Fuseli's penchant for dark, vaguely articulated spaces. The red curtains shorten the visual plane creating a condensed and intimate space. A wooden nightstand and footstool sit in front of the bed in the left corner of the canvas. While the objects and the female figure suggest that the scene is in a contemporary setting, the painting does not depict a nightmare as it would appear to the dreamer. Instead, it is a representation of the experience of a nightmare. The audience can see the incubus, the

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<sup>7</sup> Christoph Becker, "Friar Puck and Fairy Shot: The Spirits in Fuseli's Art," in *Fuseli: The Wild Swiss* (Zürich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2005), 138; According to mythology, the incubus sought out sleeping females in order to engage in sexual activity with the unconscious victim. By the eighteenth-century, however, the incubus became synonymous with nightmare and could be used when describing the affliction for both sexes.

presumed cause of the nightmare, and the distressing effects on the sleeping woman, but not the actual content of her dream.

## CHAPTER 3

### Original Reception of *The Nightmare*

*The Nightmare* made quite a sensation when it first appeared in the 1782 Royal Academy summer exhibition . It received a number of mixed reviews as well as confused interpretations. One of the most common endeavors of the critics was an attempt to identify the subject of the painting as a scene from a Shakespeare play, as Fuseli commonly drew on the Bard for subjects for his compositions. The review by “Puzzlepate” in the London *Morning Herald* of May 8, 1782 described the painting as:

a wildness of conception in Mr. Fuseli’s picture of the Night Shade at the Royal Academy, which teems with that usual concomitant of genius, inaccuracy. He has introduced a mare’s head into the piece, to characterise his subject. Now the personification of that disorder, which attacks the human frame in sleep, is borrowed from a word of northern origin; Mair or Mère, a witch or sorceress. Shakespeare’s Mad Tom mentions her in that character from some legendary ballad, not unknown, perhaps, to the ingenious compiler [Thomas Percy] of the reliques of our Ancient English poetry.<sup>8</sup>

The incubus seated on the sleeping figure is here related to the folkloric figure of a “Mair” or “mara” for the purpose of linking it to a literary figure in Shakespeare’s work. Similarly, other critics suggested that the painting depicts the Queen Mab character who appears in both *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and in Mercutio’s speech in *Romeo and Juliet*.<sup>9</sup>

The accusation of Fuseli’s “usual concomitant of genius, inaccuracy” points to another debate in the work’s reception: whether the piece displayed artistic genius or was

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<sup>8</sup> Puzzlepate, *Morning Herald*, May 8 1782, cited in Frayling, 11.

<sup>9</sup> Frayling, 11.

poorly executed. A critic in the May 9, 1782 edition of the London *Morning Chronicle* also had a hard time forming a judgment on Fuseli's painting. He noted:

*The Nightmare*, by Mr. Fuseli like all his productions has strong marks of genius about it; but hag-riding is too unpleasant a thought to be agreeable to anyone, and is unfit for furniture or reflection – *Qui bono?*... Yet surely a disagreeable subject, well executed, is preferable to the most engaging one ill described.<sup>10</sup>

In contrast to the *Morning Herald's* review of the previous morning, the *Morning Chronicle's* critic was not concerned by Fuseli's execution but the subject matter. This critic did not interpret the painting as a Shakespearean scene, so he did not perceive the subject as having high moral content.<sup>11</sup>

That Fuseli's painting received mixed critical review might seem somewhat unexpected, given his education and station within the artistic community. As a youth, he received a classical education in preparation for a lifetime in the clergy. Born in Switzerland, Fuseli's father encouraged him on a religious path. Hence, Fuseli did not begin his career as an artist until he moved to England in 1764. While this was late in life to begin artistic training, he had a stronger classical education than most of his artistic contemporaries.<sup>12</sup> When Fuseli began his training in art, he had the support of the Royal Academy president, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and followed the tradition of artists to gain knowledge and skill from the great artists of the past by traveling to Italy to see and learn from artistic masterpieces in person.<sup>13</sup> As expected from an artist with a classical

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<sup>10</sup> *Morning Chronicle* May 9, 1782 cited in Frayling, 11.

<sup>11</sup> Christopher Frayling's essay in *Gothic Nightmares: Blake, Fuseli, and the Romantic Imagination* examines many of the published contemporary responses to *The Nightmare*, particularly an series of editorials by Reverend Richard Bromley who strongly disapproved of Fuseli's art and Fuseli's rebuttals to Bromley that he published under a pseudonym.

<sup>12</sup> Martin Myrone, *Henry Fuseli* (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 2001), 11.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

education and who studied the great artists of the past, Fuseli had a number of distinctions during his career. He was elected Academician at the Royal Academy where he held posts as a professor and Keeper of the Key. He lectured on and published artistic theory in his *Aphorisms* that espoused the traditions and standards of high art. His classical education and abilities with languages led to his translation of the art theories presented by the influential theoretician Johann Winckelmann.<sup>14</sup> Despite these accolades, Fuseli's art often received mixed reviews such as those about *The Nightmare*.

Perhaps due to the large number of responses and reviews to the art in the show, attendance to the exhibition that year boomed, boasting 12,533 visitors more than the preceding year.<sup>15</sup> Following the exhibition, Fuseli's painting gained popularity that led to him creating at least six versions of *The Nightmare* for print sellers (fig. 2) as well as variations on canvas such as the 1790 version by the same title (fig. 3) and the 1794 *Incubus Leaving Two Girls* (fig. 4) which clarifies how the incubus arrived on a flying horse. The general familiarity of *The Nightmare* brought on by its numerous prints led to it becoming the source for printed caricatures and political cartoons within five years of the painting's exhibition.<sup>16</sup> The 1798 caricature *The Nightmare or the Source of the Nile* (fig. 5) presents English actress and mistress, Emma Hamilton, as the female figure with her lover, Lord Nelson, seated on top in the incubus's position lifting her skirts, altering the scene of terror to one of bawdy satire. Similarly, part of a detail in a lithograph of *The*

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<sup>14</sup> Nicolas Powell, *Fuseli: The Nightmare*, Art in Context (London: Allen Lane, 1973), 20.

<sup>15</sup> Frayling, 11

<sup>16</sup> Martin Myrone and others, *Gothic Nightmares: Fuseli, Blake and the Romantic Imagination* (London: Tate Publishing, 2006), 49.

The earliest extant caricature is Thomas Rowlandson's *A Covent Garden Night Mare* that was printed by William Humphrey in 1784. How quickly these re-appropriations for satire, as well as how long they continued demonstrates the popularity of the image among the general public. However, the use of the image in such low brow images may also have contributed to the painting falling into obscurity in art historical discourse.

*Racing Nightmare* after A.C. Havell (figs. 6 and 6a) presents a sleeping gambler on his back who, in his dreams, is tormented by debt collectors, the horses from the races, and a bookie. The exposure brought by these multiple prints led to the painting's international circulation and its becoming *the* iconographic image of a nightmare.<sup>17</sup>

During the nineteenth century, *The Nightmare* maintained its popularity through the large number of related prints and references to it in political cartoons. Nicholas Powell suggests that the accessibility of procuring a print of the painting as well as its continued appropriation in caricature led to a lowered stature of the painting in high art circles in Britain.<sup>18</sup> Literary critic Ruthven Todd, on the other hand, suggested that Fuseli's difficult personality, combined with a misunderstanding of his art by his contemporaries were what led to the decline of Fuseli's reputation, and hence his most recognized canvas, after his death.<sup>19</sup> The cause was likely a combination of factors, but the end result was that Fuseli's art largely fell out of favor in artistic discourse for nearly a century. While Fuseli's aphorisms did sometimes appear in art historical surveys published in the nineteenth century, his art was very rarely included. It was not until after its rediscovery during the 1930s that *The Nightmare* and Fuseli's art re-entered art historical dialogue and inquiry.

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<sup>17</sup> Martin Myrone, "Henry Fuseli and Gothic Spectacle," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (2007): 50-51.

<sup>18</sup> Powell, 94-95.

<sup>19</sup> Ruthven Todd, *Tracks in the Snow; Studies in English Science and Art* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1947), 78-80; Ruthven Todd, "The Reputation of Henry Fuseli," *Horizon*, no. 9 (1942): 404-415. It is important to note that Todd was a poet and William Blake scholar who was associated with the Surrealists in Paris during the 1930s. He was not an art historian; however, he developed an interest in Fuseli that led to a chapter on Fuseli in his book and a subsequent article in the 1942 issue of *Horizon*.

## CHAPTER 4

### The Surrealist Connection

Fuseli's reappearance in fine art circles occurred when members of the Surrealist movement saw a kinship between the subject and affective style of *The Nightmare* and their psychological explorations of dreams. In 1936, two of Fuseli's works were included in Alfred Barr's exhibition, *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*, in the Museum of Modern Art in New York: a small watercolor costume study and the 1790 version of *The Nightmare*. These works were not the focus of the exhibition, but their inclusion in this show demonstrates the beginning of a trend that continued in scholarly and lay discourse about Henry Fuseli's *The Nightmare*, that the painting was ahead of its time and foreshadowed the ideas of Surrealism.<sup>20</sup> This retroactive examination of earlier art in relation to modern works was key in Alfred Barr's goal to show a historical progression of the "fantastic" that led to the abstract art of Dada and Surrealism. Accordingly, the exhibition and the catalogue were organized by categorizing the art into the following eras: Fantastic Art of the Past; Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries; From the French Revolution to the Great War; 20<sup>th</sup>-century Pioneers; and Dada and Surrealism.<sup>21</sup> Like the famous flowchart that graced the catalog cover of Barr's earlier exhibition (fig. 7), the organization of the Fantastic Art exhibition suggests a teleology in the fine arts that

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<sup>20</sup> Alfred H. Barr and Georges Hugnet, *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (The Museum of Modern Art, 1936), 10.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

logically and perhaps necessarily terminates in the abstract practitioners of Surrealism.<sup>22</sup>

The catalog only briefly mentions Fuseli in its introduction as belonging to the terrifying and fantastic art from the eighteenth century that served as a precursor to Surrealism. The inclusion of these two works in a major and influential exhibition, however, signifies a revival of artistic interest in Fuseli.

Interestingly, the reaction of one art historian to the exclusion of Fuseli's painting from a 1939 Parisian exhibition on dreams also demonstrates the affinity some critics felt *The Nightmare* had with Surrealism.<sup>23</sup> In his 1942 book examining Fuseli's life and art, Edmond Jaloux noted that the painting had not appeared in the small show in a gallery on Rue de Seine. The show was curated largely by Surrealists living in Paris, and while Jaloux praised the show's goal to exhibit Surrealist works, but he felt that a number of vital Surrealist works were missing. According to Jaloux, the exhibition:

contained an insufficient number of surrealist works (it was even missing the most striking of all, the most accomplished: Salvador Dali, Chirico, Max Ernst). However, there was Wolfgang Paalen with his incredible transformations of objects, André Masson, Yves Tanguy, Juan Miro, Paul Klee among the allied painters.<sup>24</sup>

That Fuseli's painting was also not included in the show which prompted an entire chapter in Jaloux's book in which he argued that the painting demonstrates the ideas of

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<sup>22</sup> A. Umland, A. Sudhalter, and S. Gerson, *Dada in the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art* (Museum of Modern Art, 2008), 19-20. Barr viewed the exhibition *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* as the second installation in a series on abstract art. *Cubism and Abstract Art* was the first installation that occurred earlier the same year. The catalog cover depicting a flow chart mapping Barr's proposed evolution of art from figural to abstract became an iconic image in modern art. The organization of *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* continued Barr's categorization of art history with the goal of demonstrating abstract art as the natural evolution following figural art.

<sup>23</sup> Edmond Jaloux, *Johann-Heinrich Füssli* (Genève: Pierre Cailler, 1942), 89.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 89

Translation by Melanie Davison. The original quote from the book is: "elle contenait un nombre insuffisant d'oeuvres surréalistes, (il y manquait même les plus éclatants de tous, les plus accomplis: Salvador Dali, Chirico, Max Ernst). En revanche, on y trouvait Wolfgang Paalen, avec ses transformations hallucinantes d'objets, André Masson, Yves Tanguy, Juan Miro, Paul Klee, et parmi les peintres alliés."



Surrealism and should have been displayed along with prominent Surrealists.<sup>25</sup> John Woodward also noted a kinship between the themes of Fuseli's work and Surrealism in his 1950 review of Paul Ganz's 1949 book examining Fuseli's drawing. Woodward stated that the artist's merits were "not in fact [recognized] until the 1930's when, significantly, there was a new respect shown for dreams and symbols. Things that had previously appeared as absurdities or anachronisms in Fuseli's work became all at once fashionable."<sup>26</sup> Fuseli's art, particularly his most famous piece, *The Nightmare*, seemed to hold special interest for critics interested in Surrealism as an indication of the beginnings of psychological representations in art. Ruthven Todd, a poet and literary scholar associated with the Surrealists, was one of the first to publish a study of Fuseli in the twentieth century.<sup>27</sup> He argued that this interest in what he terms the "subconscious" which appears in works such as those by Surrealists de Chirico and Miró also initiated the reconsideration of Fuseli's art. He quoted the Surrealist painter John Piper's assertion that "Fuseli reappears today quite naturally. Our transitional period reflects his own... Fuseli's work is probably closer now than it has been since his death."<sup>28</sup>

These descriptions of Fuseli's work demonstrate the tendency of those interested in Surrealism to see its kinship with his art, particularly the seemingly psychologically rooted *The Nightmare*. Fuseli's aphorism that "one of the most unexplored regions of art are dreams"<sup>29</sup> seemed to speak directly to the Surrealists. This common interest, as well

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 89-92.

<sup>26</sup> John Woodward, "The Drawings of Henry Fuseli," *The Burlington Magazine* 92, no. 573 (1950): 359.

<sup>27</sup> Ewing, Jack. 2015. "Ruthven Todd." *Salem Press Biographical Encyclopedia*, EBSCOhost (accessed April 23, 2016).

<sup>28</sup> Todd, *Tracks in the Snow; Studies in English Science and Art*, 84.

<sup>29</sup> Henry Fuseli and John Knowles, *Lectures. Aphorisms. A History of Art in the Schools of Italy* (H. Colburn and R. Bentley, 1831), 145.

as the similarly negative reviews their paintings received during their [contemporary] showings, led to the perception that Fuseli's painting was ahead of its time and a forerunner of the Surrealist movement. Though the perception of *The Nightmare* as a forerunner to modern theories about dreams and the unconscious brought the painting back to the attention of the artistic community, this practice also undermined the artist's meaningful relationship to his own time. Following this initial association of the painting with Surrealist ideologies, it would be the goal of the subsequent scholarship to challenge as anachronistic the claim that *The Nightmare* was a proto-Surrealist work and to understand the work within the traditions of later eighteenth-century artistic practices.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Despite the scholarship demonstrating why *The Nightmare* cannot be considered a proto-Surrealist work, the strong relation that many see between the eighteenth-century painting and early twentieth-century interest in the subconscious leads some researchers to continue to place *The Nightmare* as a forerunner to Surrealist art. One such example is Stefanie Heraeus's 1999 article "Artists and the Dream in Nineteenth-Century Paris: Towards a Prehistory of Surrealism." While has been argued that it is anachronistic to relate the perspectives and philosophy of Surrealism to *The Nightmare*, the desire to continue to make a connection between the painting and modern ideologies demonstrates part of what makes Fuseli's work universal.

## CHAPTER 5

### Iconographical Readings of *The Nightmare*

Frederick Antal, an Austrian scholar most noted for his Marxist perspective, was the first art historian to provide a book-length study of Fuseli during the twentieth century. His research, published posthumously in 1956, played a pivotal role in the revival and direction of Fuseli scholarship. Antal examined Fuseli's art within the context of English neoclassicism and Fuseli's interest in the art of Michelangelo and the Mannerists.<sup>31</sup> Mannerism was an area of particular interest for this scholar who inherited his mentor Max Dvorák's perception of the style as a metaphysical and spiritual art form, but Antal perceived it as running counter to the Neoclassicism of artists such as Reynolds and West. Antal admitted his interest in Fuseli's adoption of Mannerist styles stemmed from his perceived correlation between its departure from the pristine and, in his eyes, less spirited art of many of Fuseli's contemporaries and the challenges Surrealist art posed to figural art. However, he warned that viewers should not allow this perceived connection to sway their interpretation of the painting as ahead of its time. Through his research, Antal endeavored to place Fuseli's art solidly within the context and practices of his time, an argument that becomes the cornerstone for much of the Fuseli scholarship that followed.<sup>32</sup>

The foundation of Antal's argument that Fuseli's art follows eighteenth-century fine art practices despite its seemingly divergent appearance lies in the artistic tradition of

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<sup>31</sup> Frederick Antal, *Fuseli Studies* (London: Routledge & Paul, 1956), 1.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

finding inspiration in art historically significant works of art from the past. In his *Seven Discourses* presented at the Royal Academy's inaugural address and six subsequent annual meetings, Academy President Sir Joshua Reynolds extolled the virtues of looking to the "Great Masters" whose works have withstood the test of time. At the inaugural address for the academy, Reynolds stated that:

The principal advantage of an academy is, that, besides furnishing able men to direct the student, it will be a repository for the great examples of the art. These are the materials on which genius is to work, and without which the strongest intellect may be fruitlessly or deviously employed. By studying these authentic models, that idea of excellence which is the result of the accumulated experience of past ages may be at once acquired, and the tardy and obstructed progress of our predecessors may teach us a shorter and easier way.<sup>33</sup>

Antal's scholarship focused on how Fuseli's painting upholds this tradition in art. Though a neoclassical style was more prominent in the works of other Academicians like Reynolds or Benjamin West, Fuseli's sources of inspiration such as Michelangelo and Giulio Romano were considered among the great masters whom Reynolds discussed specifically in his discourses.<sup>34</sup>

Antal presents Fuseli's oeuvre as a progression from his early work that develops, during his tour of Italy, through drawing from classical works of art and a constant interest in the dramatic found in the Mannerist style.<sup>35</sup> It is important to note that when Antal discusses *The Nightmare*, he is referring to the 1790 canvas (fig. 3). When his book

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<sup>33</sup> Sir Joshua Reynolds, *The Discourses of Sir Joshua Reynolds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1842), 8.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 77-78.

<sup>35</sup> The most thorough scholarship documenting possible sources for the painting is Nicholas Powell's chapter "The Judicious Adoption of Figures in Art" in his book *Fuseli: The Nightmare*. Other scholars who also research this topic include H.W. Janson, Gert Schiff, Peter Tomory, Caroline Keay, Miles Chappell, and Andrus Dana. Also, Christopher Frayling includes a table with a brief summary of the commonly accepted art historical sources for the painting in his article in *Gothic Nightmares: Fuseli, Blake and the Romantic Imagination*.

was published, the original 1781 canvas had not yet been gifted to the Detroit Institute of Art and was not available to study.<sup>36</sup> Antal presented a number of possible sources for the compositional elements as well as the figures in works of art that Fuseli may have seen in person or known through reproductions and engravings. Antal suggests that the 1538-9 fresco, *Hecuba's Dream* (fig. 8) by sixteenth century Mannerist Giulio Romano could be one source for *The Nightmare's* reclining female. Also, the horse head at the edge of the couch Hecuba lies upon could have been an inspiration for the horse in Fuseli's work.<sup>37</sup> Another possible Mannerist inspiration that Antal presents is Marcantonio Raimondi's sixteenth-century engraving *Dream of Raphael* (fig. 9) which has two sleeping nude women who are approached by "Bosch-like" monsters that could have been the visual source for the incubus.<sup>38</sup> While Antal concentrated on positing likely sources for Fuseli's art, he did not offer further visual exploration. His research began the comparison of *The Nightmare* with ancient sources, but more critical comparisons became necessary as scholars presented various possible visual sources for Fuseli's figures and composition.

In his 1963 article in *Arts and Sciences*, "Fuseli's Nightmare," H.W. Janson continued Antal's aim of identifying classical sources for Fuseli's 1790 version of *The Nightmare*. However, Janson, a student of Panofsky's Hamburg school that studied iconography, expands on Antal's original research to create an interpretation of the painting as uncharacteristic of Fuseli's oeuvre. Where Antal viewed the painting as a stage in Fuseli's stylistic evolution towards dramatic, Mannerist-inspired works of art,

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<sup>36</sup> While Antal is looking at the 1790 version of *The Nightmare*, later scholars such as Powell find that some of the sources Antal suggests for the later canvas are also valid for the original 1781 painting.

<sup>37</sup> Antal, 92-92.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 93.

Janson saw the work as diverging from many of Fuseli's tendencies, such as drawing on literary subjects and even from the tenets he espoused in his writings on art. Janson suggested that when Fuseli discussed freedom in art within his writing, he meant the freedom to choose the literary subject and scene to depict in his art; an artist should not be restricted to the scenes most often depicted in fine art.<sup>39</sup> Despite this different interpretation, Janson also begins his investigation of the painting with a comparison to Romano's *Dream of Hecuba* (fig. 8) but gives a much deeper visual analysis and comparison of the two works than did Antal.<sup>40</sup>

Analyzing Romano's fresco, Janson discusses the formula established from classical times for portraying a sleeping figure: the dreamer reclining with her head supported by one arm to signify sleep and not death. Above the sleeping figure of Hecuba is a dark winged figure with a torch prophesying the destruction of Troy. Janson noted that, while Romano's fresco and Fuseli's *The Nightmare* share a basic composition of a sleeping woman with a dark and foreboding figure above her, their delineation of the dream world and the present is very different. In the fresco, the dreaming Hecuba does not react to the image above her; the dream occupies a different conceptual space than does the dreamer. One sees Hecuba, the dreamer, and above her, her dream. In Fuseli's painting, the fantastical figure is having a visible effect on the dreamer who appears to be in agony. In Fuseli's canvas, the subject of the dream and the dreaming figure appear to be in the same conceptual space; the demarcation between the world of the dream and reality begins to blur and creates a different focus than does Romano's work. According

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<sup>39</sup> Janson: 23.

<sup>40</sup> Janson's visual analysis and comparison of *The Nightmare* pertained to the 1790 canvas, but he did recognize the 1781 canvas recently obtained by The Detroit Institute of Art as likely to be the originally exhibited painting, and began asking questions as to how this canvas may be researched and better understood in the future.

to Janson, Romano's painting urges the viewer to concentrate on the content of the dream where as Fuseli's painting allows the viewer to experience the nightmare.<sup>41</sup>

Following the tenets of iconography, Janson also began making connections between the painting and contemporary events and interests to reach a greater understanding of the painting. He noted four lines of verse from Erasmus Darwin's 1791 *Botanic Garden* accompanied Thomas Burke's 1783 engraving after the painting:

--On his Night-Mare thru, the evening fog,  
Flits the squab Fiend o'er fen and lake, and bog;  
Seeks some love-wildred maid with sleep oppressed,  
Alights, and grinning, sits upon her breast.<sup>42</sup>

Darwin knew Fuseli, and Janson speculated that when Darwin saw the unfinished canvas, he was inspired by the painting to include this verse in *Botanic Garden*, an epic poem that explored contemporary beliefs about physiology and health. Janson also noted the sexual undertones of the painting which he correlated to Dr. John Bond's essay on the causes of nightmares that specifically linked them to virginal women and claimed they could be cured by marriage.<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, Janson suggested that a more thorough inquiry into Fuseli's biography may provide insight into the painting. Janson noted the acquisition of the original 1781 canvas of *The Nightmare* and discusses the discovery of an extra piece of canvas found attached to the back of the painting during the restoration. Once that was removed, a portrait of a woman was found on the back of the painting. Janson proposed that this portrait represented Anna Landolt, an unrequited love of Fuseli's, and that she was the

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<sup>41</sup> Janson: 24.

<sup>42</sup> Myrone and others, *Gothic Nightmares: Fuseli, Blake and the Romantic Imagination*, 49; Janson:26.

<sup>43</sup> Janson: 26.

model for the victim of the nightmare on the other side of the canvas (fig. 10).<sup>44</sup> The discovery of the image on the verso and its interpretation as Landolt fueled much of the scholarship for the painting in the coming decades. Scholars were intrigued by the implied psychology in the narrative of Fuseli's [unrequited] love interest and the seeming visual revenge he took by depicting his beloved.

Janson's general inquiries into the different aspects of Fuseli's painting drove the scholarly discourse on *The Nightmare* through the twentieth century. While the purpose of presenting a myriad of inquiries about the painting is to open discourse and examination about the different facets of a work of art, the iconographical method that dominated Fuseli scholarship until the close of the century is indicative of the prominence of the approach of Janson's mentor, Erwin Panofsky. Panofsky's method requires the scholar to combine the visual elements of a painting with historically informed context in order to produce the most accurate interpretation.<sup>45</sup> Given the extent to which this method was central to art historical discourse as a discipline, it is not surprising that it became the cornerstone of much of Fuseli's scholarship as well.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 28.

<sup>45</sup> Erwin Panofsky, "Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art," in *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History*. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955), 39.



## CHAPTER 6

### Psychoanalytical Readings of *The Nightmare*

Following Janson's identification of Anna Landolt as the model for the sleeping victim, scholars began examining possible psychoanalytical readings of the painting. Anna Landolt was the niece of Fuseli's longtime friend and well known physiognomist, Johann Caspar Lavater.<sup>46</sup> Fuseli met Landolt in Zurich during his return travels from Italy in 1778 and developed a deep attraction to her. However, he sabotaged any possible relationship with her by flirting with the already married Magdalena Schweizer-Hess.<sup>47</sup> Following his rejection by Landolt, Fuseli continued to harbor feelings for her that were never returned. Agreeing with Janson on the resemblance of the female figure to Landolt, scholars such as Peter Tomory and Gert Schiff argued that the painting is a visualization of the frustration caused by Fuseli's unrequited affection.<sup>48</sup>

In his 1973 monograph on Fuseli, Gert Schiff presented a psychoanalytical reading of *The Nightmare*.<sup>49</sup> Schiff contended that the implied violence against the sleeping figure suggests a deep hostility towards Landolt.<sup>50</sup> Schiff read Fuseli's self-

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<sup>46</sup> Gert Schiff, *Henry Fuseli, 1741-1825*, trans., Sarah Twohig (London: Tate Gallery, 1975), 122.

<sup>47</sup> Peter Tomory, *The Life and Art of Henry Fuseli* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972), 10-11; Fuseli became friends with Johann Kaspar Lavater while at school in Zurich. The two had similar ideas on justice which led to them creating a pamphlet criticizing the local magistrate for abusing his power and authority. As a result of these actions, Fuseli and Lavater had to leave Zurich. Even after their travels together ended, Lavater would remain Fuseli's longest and closest friend throughout his life.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 10-11; While Peter Tomory agrees with the interpretation of the figure as Anna Landolt, he does not stress the importance of that identification to the extent that Gert Schiff would. He suggests that using Landolt's likeness in *The Nightmare* was a means for Fuseli to reconcile his unrequited love for Landolt. Similar to Tomory, Nicholas Powell and Martin Myrone accept the reading of the female figure as Anna Landolt, but do not view that as central to understanding the painting.

<sup>49</sup> Schiff, 18.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 122

sabotaging actions that severed his relationship with Landolt as a fear of commitment to and an avoidance of women who the artist saw as intellectual equals. Schiff posited that Fuseli's ultimate marriage to Sophia Rawlins, who Schiff believed was the artist's social and intellectual inferior, was further example of this behavior.<sup>51</sup>

One question is why Fuseli would push away the woman whom he desired and matched in social and intellectual terms and then accept an inferior alternative? Schiff examined Fuseli's treatment of female figures in his other paintings to try to understand these actions. He found that Fuseli often portrays women in cruel and domineering roles. One such drawing (fig. 11) presents a man drowning in a well while a courtesan holds a plait of hair just out of his reach. Schiff noted that female hairstyles were a fetish of Fuseli, and its depiction in causing male suffering was indicative of Fuseli's conflicted feelings and underlying resentment of women.<sup>52</sup> He also noted that Sophia Rawlings was rumored to have been argumentative and tyrannical when not in public. Schiff found that portraits of the artist's wife, particularly those later in their marriage, presented her with eyes that are "domineering, cold, even cruel."<sup>53</sup> Schiff concluded that the hostility present in various female figures by Fuseli, combined with actions such as sabotaging his relationship with Landolt and marrying Rawling, demonstrated that Fuseli actually hated women and was repressing homosexual desires.<sup>54</sup>

This use of a psychoanalytical method demonstrates the application of another modern perspective to Fuseli's painting. While other scholars discussed the portrayal of Anna Landolt as a means for Fuseli to work through his unrequited feelings for Landolt,

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 18.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 17

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

Schiff, an openly homosexual man,<sup>55</sup> was able to perceive an alternative interpretation of the relationship between the ways in which the subjects were portrayed in the painting and the biographical information scholars had gathered that seemed relevant to the image. By employing a psychoanalytical methodology that examines how images may present unconscious, particularly sexual, desires, Schiff was able to speculate on how the image relates to Fuseli as a person and an artist. While Schiff's interpretation of Fuseli's work is the most extreme in its conclusions, his inquiry into Fuseli's personal drawings and pornographic works prompted further scholarship that examined gender relationships in Fuseli's art but within the artist's social context.

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<sup>55</sup> Lee Sorensen, "Schiff, Gert" <https://dictionaryofarthistorians.org/schiffg.htm> (accessed 23 April 2016).

## CHAPTER 7

### *The Nightmare* and Socio-historical Interpretations

Contemporaneous to Schiff's research, a deeper investigation of the iconography of the painting in relation to socio-historical concerns in eighteenth-century England emerged. Where earlier iconographic studies focused on how the adoption of art historically significant motifs and sources in the painting demonstrated that Fuseli was participating in the established conventions for high art, this inquiry into the different social and cultural contexts signifies a shift towards a postmodern perspective that allows for multiple interpretations of a work of art.

One particular concern examined in recent scholarship is the inadequacy of eighteenth-century empirical research that sought to explain the causes of nightmares or offer a reliable solution to the malady. While empirical studies sought to banish supernatural beliefs such as witchcraft, nightmares were an example of a natural phenomenon that could not be explained rationally.<sup>56</sup> In his 1973 book-length study of the painting, Nicholas Powell examined how the late eighteenth-century understanding of nightmares is reflected in the iconography of *The Nightmare*.<sup>57</sup> This text still serves as the most comprehensive study of *The Nightmare* and it references all of the dominant interpretations of the painting to that point.

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<sup>56</sup> Powell, 45.

<sup>57</sup> Both Christoph Becker and Christopher Frayling discuss how eighteenth century beliefs about nightmares affect our understanding and reading of *The Nightmare*. Becker focuses on the supernatural elements of the painting and placing it with Fuseli's other works about fairies and supernatural creatures. Conversely, Frayling focuses on Fuseli's knowledge of empirical studies about nightmares and how that knowledge appears in the figures and configuration of the painting.

In his examination of the figures in the painting, Powell identified references to the scientific understanding of a nightmare combined with the supernatural and folkloric explanations of the malady. The victim's supine position represents one of the most common beliefs about a possible cause of nightmares: that laying on one's back blocks the circulation of internal fluids and leads to the feeling of oppression associated with a nightmare. Dr. John Bond, an acquaintance of Fuseli's and a physician who wrote the 1753 *An Essay on the Incubus, or Nightmare*, stated in his book: "The Nightmare generally seizes people sleeping on their backs, and often begins with frightful dreams, which are soon succeeded by a difficult respiration, a violent oppression of the breast, and a total privation of voluntary motion."<sup>58</sup> Bond and contemporary physicians also suggested that diet, lifestyle, and sleeping position affected dreams. Bond argued that "Young people of gross full habits, the luxurious, the drunken and they who sup late, are most subject to the night-mare. Also Women who are obstructed; girls full of lax habits before the eruption of menses."<sup>59</sup> According to Powell, this belief that people, especially women, were prone to lavish activities and therefore more susceptible to nightmares is appears in the painting when one employs a physiological reading of the painting. That the victim is female already makes her a likely victim, and the four post bed adorned with curtains and lavish embroidered bedding indicate that she is a woman from high society. Her bed is disheveled and she lies on top of the blankets giving the impression of

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<sup>58</sup> John Bond, *An Essay on the Incubus, or Night-Mare* (D. Wilson and T. Durham, 1753), cited in Powell, 50.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

someone who fell on to an unmade bed, likely too tired and drunk to prepare fully for bed after late-night indulgences that included fine foods and alcohol.<sup>60</sup>

While the indications of a physiological cause for the nightmare would have been recognizable to a late eighteenth-century audience, the visual references are subtle compared to the supernatural elements that created the terrifying fantasy of the image.<sup>61</sup> The incubus seated on the sleeping figure is a direct reference to English folklore. During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the term “incubus” was used interchangeably with the word “nightmare”.<sup>62</sup> The relationship between the nightmare and supernatural beings appears within the very term itself. The term “mare” in nightmare stems from the Germanic term “mahr” and the Norse term “mara” which both refer to a supernatural being who lies on a sleeping person’s chest and suffocates them. Since the term “incubus” was synonymous with “nightmare” during the eighteenth century, the small demonic creature perched on the sleeping figure serves the dual purpose of indicating that the viewer is witnessing a victim of a nightmare while also recalling the mythological source of nightmares.<sup>63</sup>

Following Powell’s research, Martin Myrone offers the most extensive research into Henry Fuseli’s oeuvre as a cohesive representation of late eighteenth-century societal concerns and tastes. He produced a book-length study of the artist (2001), served as the leading author for the Tate Gallery exhibition catalog *Gothic Nightmares: Fuseli, Blake, and the Romantic Imagination* (2006), and published an article on Fuseli in the

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Following Powell’s research, Christoph Becker continued the examination of the folkloric roots of the supernatural iconography of *The Nightmare* in his 2005 essay for the exhibition catalog *Fuseli: The Wild Swiss*.

<sup>62</sup> Bond, 1.

<sup>63</sup> Powell, 49.

*Huntington Library Quarterly* (2007). His research covers a variety of perspectives and ideas within Fuseli's art, but all of his publications reinforce the view that Fuseli's art was not prophetic of a later artistic era and can be understood as a product of his own epoch.

One of the primary areas of inquiry for Myrone is the representation of gender in art. This led him to taking particular interest in the treatment of the female subject in *The Nightmare*. Myrone accepted the earlier theories that the central figure refers to Anna Landolt; however, he argued that the identification is not vital to interpreting the image. Instead, Myrone compared *The Nightmare* to a number of pornographic works by Fuseli that depict women in positions of power or even as a threat to male figures (fig. 12). Where those images show the male figure in a position of weakness and at times, even endangered, *The Nightmare* presents the opposite, with the female at risk of sexual violence from the male incubus. Myrone argues that the flaccid and vulnerable form of the woman and the threatening and upright form of the incubus reflect anxieties about shifting gender roles that occurred in that era.<sup>64</sup> The restriction of females to the home was being increasingly challenged, particularly through the rise of consumer culture that largely targeted women as well as the increase in women's participation in political and intellectual activities.<sup>65</sup> Myrone posits that the tensions visible in both *The Nightmare* and the pornographic works serve as a visual "working through" of fears about changing female roles and authority of the time.

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<sup>64</sup> Myrone, *Henry Fuseli*, 70.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

Shifts in social class also led to increased anxieties as a rising middle class called into question the authority of the elite and governing class starting from the middle of the eighteenth century. This challenge to the previous concept of authority also occurred in cultural arenas through consumerism and an enlarged access to previously elite commodities such as the fine arts.<sup>66</sup> This, along with the rise in public art exhibitions, led to a shift in the perspectives and priorities of many artists who had new patrons to attract. In a large exhibition hall, walls were filled with art, so the artist had to make his works draw the eye of visitors, leading to increasingly more sensationalist and dramatic subjects and compositions.<sup>67</sup>

Myrone posited that, in the midst of such shifts in English society, Fuseli stood out as the master of paradoxically upholding the practices and traditions of high art while creating the sensational and shocking scenes that attracted the attention of the lay public.<sup>68</sup> He argued that, “The most fascinating aspect of Fuseli’s art is the way that it not only participated in these changes but how in their very form and subject matter his images also represented the processes of change themselves.”<sup>69</sup> Fuseli was the creator of fantastical paintings such as *The Nightmare* and the 1783 canvas, *The Three Witches* (fig. 13). Both of these images utilize striking contrasts of light and dark, ambiguous space, and supernatural subjects to create dramatic scenes that would capture the attention of a visitor in a public exhibition. But, he was also the translator of Winckelmann, the Keeper of Art for the Royal Academy, the author of the *Aphorisms*

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 9.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 36. While the goal of the public exhibitions was to present high, moral art, the effect of the shift from art as a private commodity to a public one led to artists catering to the tastes of the public. In the May 2, 1785 edition of the *Universal Daily Register*, one critic commented that “Gypsies, witches, and flying Devils seem to have engrossed the attention of many artists.”

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 9.



that espoused the academic standards of high art, and an artist who hoped to follow in the footsteps of Michelangelo. According to Myrone, these seeming contradictions and eccentricities in Fuseli's life and art were a product of the changing values and tastes of the time.

To this point, the large majority of the Fuseli scholarship starting in the mid-twentieth century focused on proving that his art did not predict artistic movements far ahead of him. By examining accepted artistic traditions and social trends and concerns, the scholars to this point have argued that interpretations of *The Nightmare* must be firmly rooted in the practices and perspectives of the late eighteenth century. Andrei Pop, the most recent scholar to publish on Fuseli, begins another direction in studying the artist and his paintings. If Fuseli's work conforms to the practices and tastes of his era, Pop questions what it is that makes *The Nightmare* stand out and differ from the art of his contemporaries. He argues that Fuseli did achieve something new and innovative in his canvas by endeavoring to make a personal experience accessible to the public as a shared experience. Pop contends that the cultural perspectives, particularly related to the eighteenth-century concept of "sympathy" allowed Fuseli to explore a new way of representing a dream that still conformed to concepts of his time.<sup>70</sup>

In order to understand the innovative shift Fuseli made in his canvas, Pop argues that the particular iconography of dream paintings is less important than the "social phenomenon" of dreaming as portrayed in the painting. In Fuseli's multiple versions of the painting, two aspects appear consistently contradictory: the composition with a

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<sup>70</sup> Andrei Pop, "Sympathetic Spectators: Henry Fuseli's *Nightmare* and Emma Hamilton's Attitudes," *Art History* 34, no. 5 (2011): 937.

sleeping figure in an interior scene implies that the viewer takes on the perspective of a conscious spectator, but the incubus seated on the figure—and in the two most well known versions of the scene, the looming horse—represent the experience of the sleeper. Pop relates this seemingly split perspective to the eighteenth-century perception of dreaming as a disjointed and contradictory experience, and this incoherence relates to a dream's ability to frighten the dreamer.<sup>71</sup>

The positions the figures take within the paintings also present another visual contradiction. The position of the sleeping figure arching up and lifting her hips up from the bed, while creating an erotic pose, physically contradicts the weight of the incubus seated on top of the figure. Pop posits that this suggests a performance aspect to the dreamer, not in the sense that she is an actress in a play but in that her physical body is acting independently of her mental state, conveying to the viewer that the figure is asleep. This separation of the body and the mind are essential to communicating the private experience during sleep. By creating a scene in which the viewer has both the perspective of the sleeping figure and the exterior view of a spectator, Pop argues that the audience becomes both the performer and spectator of his/her own dreams.<sup>72</sup>

To place this concept of combined performance and spectatorship into an eighteenth-century context, Pop examines the writings by Goethe, the renowned German literary figure, about the performances by prominent actress Emma Hamilton. She enacted of the Attitudes for which she donned shawls and created tableaux and her stance and gestures created an atmosphere in which, as Goethe wrote, one “thinks one is

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 938.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 940.

dreaming.”<sup>73</sup> German philosopher and theologian, Johann Herder similarly described his experience of watching Hamilton perform, stating “when everything was over, I was quite dismayed about her, since she had so violently awakened me from my dream.”<sup>74</sup> During both accounts, the [male] spectators felt as though they were transported to a dreamlike state where they were both watching and experiencing Hamilton’s performance of the Attitudes. This ability to identify with the private experiences of others made up the eighteenth-century concept of sympathy that was explored by Scottish philosopher David Hume in his *Treatise on Human Nature* (1741). Fuseli travelled with the aesthete in France in 1766, and Pop suggests that the artist would have shared Hume’s belief that sympathy, the ability to understand others’ feelings even when they contradict one’s own, is one of mankind’s defining and remarkable characteristics.<sup>75</sup> By engaging that sense of sympathy within a painting to make a private experience accessible to a larger public, Fuseli was able to present dreams in a more personally affective and direct way than had previous artists. This affective quality of the painting is also what makes *The Nightmare* a work of art that spoke to both its contemporary and modern viewers. Since the audience must imagine what the victim is experiencing, he/she will have to project their own experiences and understandings onto the painting. [OB]

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<sup>73</sup> Letter of March 16, 1787, in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Italienische Reise*, ed. Erich Trunz, München, 2007, 209 cited in Andrei Pop. “Sympathetic Spectators.” 941.

<sup>74</sup> Johann Gottfried Herder, *Italienische Reise*, eds. Albert Meier and Heided Hollmer, München, 1988, 361 cited in “Sympathetic Spectators.” 942.

<sup>75</sup> Pop: 947.

## CHAPTER 8

### Conclusion

The scholarship on Henry Fuseli's *The Nightmare* offers various interpretations of the work; at the same time, it reflected the particular interests and perspectives of the art historians who authored it. As Pop posits, *The Nightmare* creates a "sympathetic"-- or in today's terms-- an empathetic scene where the viewer feels as though he/she can relate and understand the experience of the victim of the nightmare. This connection on an emotional level allows the work to take on a universality that made it open to various readings. This paper examining Fuseli scholarship has sought to understand how the different perspectives in the interpretations can affect the reading and understanding of *The Nightmare* but also offer a deeper understanding of the trends in art historical theory and methods. The most recent scholarship, that examines the affective qualities of the painting, offers an explanation of why critics and lay viewers are drawn to the painting and may project their personal perspectives on the work, even if they contradict the epoch in which the painting was created. This understanding of eighteenth-century "sympathy" demonstrates how the composition encourages each viewer to experience and relate to the experience in the painting. While the painting was not specifically intended to be proto-surrealist, or representative of homosexual thoughts, or even to present the social anxieties of eighteenth-century culture, its composition which requires the viewer to take on the role of both spectator and victim and encourages a personal and individual reading from the audience, allowing for and even encouraging different interpretations.

Ultimately, this affective quality explains why the painting continues to reappear and spark the interests of artists, art historians, and viewers as the iconographic image of a nightmare.

Fig. 1



Henry Fuseli, *The Nightmare*. 1781. Oil on canvas. 101.6 cm × 127 cm. Detroit Institute of Arts.

Fig. 2



Thomas Burke, after Henry Fuseli, *The Nightmare*. 1783. Stipple Engraving in sepia. 24 cm X 27 cm. Walpole Library, Yale University.

Fig. 3



Henry Fuseli, *The Nightmare*. 1790. Oil on canvas. 76 cm X 63 cm. Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Goethemuseum.

Fig. 4



Henry Fuseli, *Incubus Leaving Two Girls*. 1794. Oil on canvas. 100 cm X 124 cm. Muraltengut, Zurich



Fig. 5



*The Nightmare or the Source of the Nile.* Print. c. 1798. England.

Fig. 6a



*The Racing Nightmare* after A.C. Havell. Published 1891 by Messrs. Fores, 41 Picadilly London. Color Photogravure. 24 in. X 18 in. The Country House Gallery, Burnley, United Kingdom.

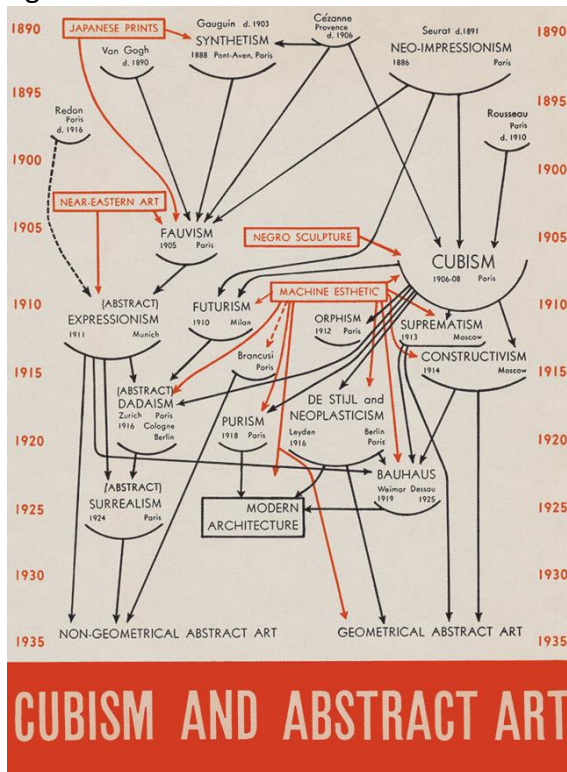


Fig. 6b



*The Racing Nightmare* (detail) after A.C. Havell. Published 1891 by Messrs. Fores, 41 Picadilly London. Color Photogravure. 24 in. X 18 in. The Country House Gallery, Burnley, United Kingdom.

Fig. 7



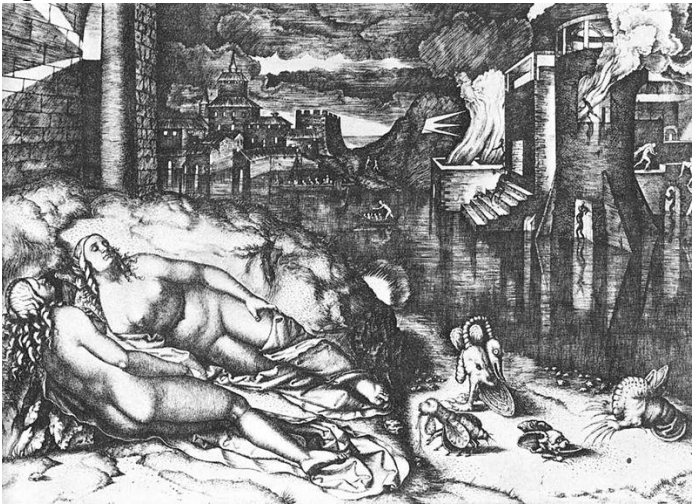
Alfred Barr. *Cubism and Abstract Art*. 1936 First Edition Dust Jacket to Catalogue. 7.75 in. X 10.25 in. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Fig. 8



Giulio Romano, *Hecuba's Dream*. c. 1538-9. Fresco. Sala di Troia, Palazzo Ducale, Mantua, Italy.

Fig. 9



Marcantonio Raimondi, *The Dream of Raphael*. 16<sup>th</sup> century, engraving. 23.7 cm X 33.1 cm. Warburg Institute, University of London, London.

Fig. 10



Henry Fuseli. *Portrait of a Young Woman* (believed to be Anna Landolt) 1781. Oil on Canvas. 101 X 127 cm. Detroit Institute of Arts.

Fig. 11



Henry Fuseli. *Female Cruelty*. 1796. Watercolor and graphite on paper. 35.7 cm X 23.2 cm Staatliche, Kunstsammlungen, Dresden.



Fig. 12



Henry Fuseli. *Symplegma: A Man with Three Women*. C. 1809-1810. Pencil drawing. 18 cm X 24.5 cm. The Victoria & Albert Museum

Fig. 13



Henry Fuseli. *The Three Witches*. 1783. Oil on canvas. 65 cm X 91.5 cm. Kunsthaus, Zurich.

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