

The Poetry of Sleep



An Anthology 1370 — 1930

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Introduction

The subject of this anthology is not dreams, but simply sleep; or, frequently, the lack of it. Insomnia and worries about the elusiveness of sleep are nothing new, as shown by several of the poets here, from Chaucer – “I haven’t slept in eight years” – to Kipling – “We wakeful; ah, pity us!” Some writers, including Wordsworth, offer heartfelt prayers to sleep, begging it to visit them.

Still others, such as Keats, gratefully celebrate the healing powers of sleep; or see it as a gift of peace prefiguring death – for instance, as in the works by Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Amy Levy. Poems by Gerard Manley Hopkins and Robert Nichols, which describe arousal from sleep, are included to represent the contrasting sides of wakefulness.

While many of the poems draw on the authors’ own experiences, a few, like D.H. Lawrence’s *Embankment at Night*, are more impersonal, observing others in their slumbers. And lullabys, the most basic of sleep-songs, are also represented here.

The eighty poems in this anthology are arranged in chronological order. Most are by English authors; other nationalities are given after the poet’s dates. All works included are in the public domain.

Reading about other people’s sleeplessness is seldom a cure for one’s own; but it’s hoped that these poets’ meditations may at least divert the reader’s wakeful hours. If all else fails, then trying to learn a poem from the collection might just do the trick.

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↑
John Gower (c.1330 – 1408)

The House of Sleep (extract from *Confessio Amantis*)

(Spellings have been modernised; there is a glossary at the end of the extract.)

Under an hill there is a Cave,
Which of the Sun may not have,
So that no man may know aright
The point between the day and night:
There is no fire, there is no spark,
There is no door, which may chark,
Whereof an eye should unshut,
So that inward there is no let.
And for to speak of that without,
There stands no great Tree nigh about
Whereon there might crow or pie
Alight, for to clepe or cry:
There is no cock to crow day,
Nor beast none which noise may
The hill, but all about round
There is growing upon the ground
Poppy, which bears the seed of sleep,
With other herbs such a heap.
A still water for the nones
Running upon the small stones,
Which hight of Lethes the river,
Under that hell in such manner
There is, which gives great appetite
To sleep. And thus full of delight
Sleep hath his house; and of his couche
Within his chamber if I shall touch,
Of ebony that sleepy Tree
The boards all about be,
And for he should sleepe soft,
Upon a featherbed aloft
He lieth with many a pillow of down:
The chamber is strowed up and down
With swevens many thousandfold.

Glossary

chark – creak

‘inward there is no let’ – inside there is no hindrance (to sleep)

crow or pie – crow or magpie

clepe – call

for the nones – for once, just now

‘which hight of Lethes the river’ – which is called the river Lethe

swevens – dreams



Geoffrey Chaucer (c.1343 – 1400)

The Book of the Duchess (extracts)

(Spellings have been modernised; there is a glossary at the end of the poem.)

I have great wonder, by this light,
How that I live, for day nor night
I may not sleep well nigh naught;
I have so many an idle thought
Purely for default of sleep
That, by my troth, I take no keep
Of nothing, how it cometh or goeth,
Nor me is nothing lief nor loath.
All is alike good to me—
Joy or sorrow, whereso it be—
For I have feeling in nothing,
But as it were a mazed thing,
Always in point to fall a-down;
For sorrowful imagination
Is always wholly in my mind.
And well ye wot, against kind
It were to live in this wise,
For nature would not suffice
To none earthly creature
Not long time to endure
Without sleep and be in sorrow.
And I ne may, nor night nor morrow,
Sleep; and thus melancholy
And dread I have for to die.
Default of sleep and heaviness
Hath slain my spirit of quickness
That I have lost all lustihood.
Such fantasies be in my head
So I know not what is best to do.
But men might ask me why so
I may not sleep and what me is.
But nonetheless, who asks this
Loseth his asking truly.
Myself can not tell why
The sooth; but truly, as I guess,
I hold it be a sickness
That I have suffered this eight year...

(While lying awake one night, the narrator reads a story about Queen Alcione, who was so sorrowful when her husband Seys drowned that she prayed to Juno to give her sleep; and Juno called on Morpheus, the god of sleep, to bring Alcione her husband's body while she slept.)

... Thus much dare I say well:
 I had been dolven every deal
 And dead, right through default of sleep,
 If I had not read and taken keep
 Of this tale next before.
 And I will tell you wherefore:
 For I might not, for bote nor bale,
 Sleep ere I had read this tale
 Of this drowned Seys the king
 And of the goddess of sleeping.
 When I had read this tale well
 And over looked it every deal,
 Me thought wonder if it were so,
 For I had never heard speak or though
 Of no goddess that could make
 Men to sleep, nor for to wake,
 For I knew never god but one.
 And in my game I said anon
 (And yet me list right evil to play)
 Rather than that I should die
 Through default of sleeping thus,
 I would give the ilk Morpheus,
 Or his goddess, dame Juno,
 Or some wight else, I know not who—
 “To make me sleep and have some rest
 I will give him the alderbest
 Gift that ever he abode his life.
 And here on ward, right now as blive,
 If he will make me sleep a lite,
 Of down of pure doves white
 I will give him a feather-bed,
 Arrayed with gold and right well clad
 In fine black satin doutremer,
 And many a pillow, and every ber
 Of cloth of Rennes, to sleep soft—
 Him there not need to turn oft—
 And I will give him all that fall
 To a chamber, and all his halls
 I will paint with pure gold
 And tapestry full many fold
 Of all sorts; this shall he have
 (If I wist where were his cave),
 If he can make me sleep soon,
 As did the goddess queen Alcione.”

Glossary

take no keep – take no heed
 nor me is nothing lief nor loath – nothing is pleasant or unpleasant to me
 in point to fall a-down – on the point of falling down
 ye wot – you know

nature would not suffice – nature would not allow
what me is – what is the matter with me
dolvén every deal – dug (i.e. buried) every bit
for bote nor bale – for good nor ill
in my game – jokingly, playfully
me list right evil to play – I had no desire to play
some wight else – some other person
on ward – in his keeping or custody
alderbest – altogether the best
blive – quickly, forthwith
sleep a lite – sleep a little
doutremer – from beyond the sea
ber – pillowcase
wist – knew

Note

This extract is based on the same legend of Queen Alcione as the previous poem by Chaucer's friend John Gower.



Anon (Trad. Irish, late medieval: translated by Eleanor Hull, 1860–1935)

The Sleep-Song of Grainne Over Dermuid When Fleeing from Fionn Mac Cumhail

Sleep a little, a little little, thou needst feel no fear or dread,
Youth to whom my love is given, I am watching near thy head.

Sleep a little, with my blessing, Dermuid of the lightsome eye,
I will guard thee as thou dreamest, none shall harm while I am by.

Sleep, O little lamb, whose homeland, was the country of the lakes,
In whose bosom torrents tremble, from whose sides the river breaks.

Sleep, as slept the ancient poet, Dedach, minstrel of the South,
When he snatched from Conall Cernach Eithne of the laughing mouth.

Sleep as slept the comely Finncha 'neath the falls of Assaroe,
Who, when stately Slaine sought him, laid the Hard-head Failbe low.

Sleep in joy, as slept fair Aine, Gailan's daughter of the west,
Where, amid the flaming torches, she and Duvach found their rest.

Sleep as Degha, who in triumph, ere the sun sang o'er the land,
Stole the maiden he had craved for, plucked her from fierce Deacall's hand.

Fold of Valour, sleep a little, Glory of the Western world;
I am wondering at thy beauty, marvelling how thy locks are curled.

Like the parting of two children, bred together in one home,
Like the breaking of two spirits, if I did not see thee come.

Swirl the leaves before the tempest, moans the night-wind o'er the lea,
Down its stony bed the streamlet hurries onward to the sea.

In the swaying boughs the linnet twitters in the darkling light,
On the upland wastes of heather wings the grouse its heavy flight.

In the marshland by the river sulks the otter in his den;
While the piping of the peewee sounds across the distant fen.

On the stormy mere the wild-duck pushes outward from the brake,
With her downy brood beside her seeks the centre of the lake.

In the east the restless roe-deer bellows to his frightened hind;
On thy track the wolf-hounds gather, sniffing up against the wind.

Yet, O Dermuid, sleep a little, this one night our fear hath fled,
Youth to whom my love is given, see, I watch beside thy bed.

Note

From *Duonaire Finn*, a compilation of late medieval Irish poems written down by Aodh Ó Dochartaigh in 1627.



Robert Henryson (c.1460 – 1500: Scotland)

Prayer for Good Dreams

Upon my right side I me lay,
Blessed Lady, to thee I pray,
For the tears that ye let
Upon your sweet Son's feet,
Send me grace for to sleep
And good dreams for to meet,
Sleeping, waking, till morrow-day be.
Our Lord is the fruit, our Lady is the tree;
Blessed be the blossom that sprang, Lady, of thee!

↑
George Gascoigne (1535 – 1578)

The Lover's Lullaby

Sing lullaby, as women do,
Wherewith they bring their babes to rest,
And lullaby can I sing too
As womanly as can the best.
With lullaby they still the child,
And if I be not much beguiled,
Full many wanton babes have I
Which must be stilled with lullaby.

First lullaby my youthful years;
It is now time to go to bed,
For crooked age and hoary hairs
Have won the haven within my head.
With lullaby, then, youth be still;
With lullaby content thy will;
Since courage quails and comes behind,
Go sleep, and so beguile thy mind.

Next, lullaby my gazing eyes,
Which wonted were to glance apace.
For every glass may now suffice
To show the furrows in my face;
With lullaby then wink awhile,
With lullaby your looks beguile;
Let no fair face nor beauty bright
Entice you eft with vain delight.

And lullaby, my wanton will;
Let reason's rule now reign thy thought,
Since all too late I find by skill
How dear I have thy fancies bought;
With lullaby now take thine ease,
With lullaby thy doubts appease.
For trust to this: if thou be still,
My body shall obey thy will.

Eke lullaby, my loving boy,
My little Robin, take thy rest;
Since age is cold and nothing coy,
Keep close thy coin, for so is best;
With lullaby be thou content,
With lullaby thy lusts relent,
Let others pay which hath mo pence;
Thou art too poor for such expense.

Thus lullaby, my youth, mine eyes,
My will, my ware, and all that was.
I can no mo delays devise,
But welcome pain, let pleasure pass;
With lullaby now take your leave,
With lullaby your dreams deceive;
And when you rise with waking eye,
Remember then this lullaby.

↑

Philip Sidney (1554 – 1586)

Astrophil and Stella: Sonnet 39

Come, Sleep, O Sleep, the certain knot of peace,
The baiting-place of wit, the balm of woe,
The poor man's wealth, the prisoner's release,
Th' indifferent judge between the high and low;
With shield of proof shield me from out the press
Of those fierce darts despair at me doth throw:
O make in me those civil wars to cease;
I will good tribute pay, if thou do so.
Take thou of me smooth pillows, sweetest bed,
A chamber deaf to noise and blind to light,
A rosy garland and a weary head:
And if these things, as being thine by right,
Move not thy heavy grace, thou shalt in me,
Livelier than elsewhere, Stella's image see.

↑

Samuel Daniel (1562 – 1619)

Care-charmer Sleep, son of the sable Night

Care-chamer Sleep, son of the sable Night,
Brother to Death, in silent darkness born,
Relieve my languish, and restore the light;
With dark forgetting of my care return.

And let the day be time enough to mourn
The shipwreck of my ill-adventured youth;
Let waking eyes suffice to wail their scorn,
Without the torment of the night's untruth.

Cease, dreams, the images of day-desires,
To model forth the passions of the morrow;
Never let rising Sun approve you liars,
To add more grief to aggravate my sorrow:

Still let me sleep, embracing clouds in vain,
And never wake to feel the day's disdain.

↑

William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616)

Sonnet 27

Weary with toil, I haste me to my bed,
The dear repose for limbs with travel tired;
But then begins a journey in my head,
To work my mind, when body's work's expired:
For then my thoughts (from far where I abide)
Intend a zealous pilgrimage to thee,
And keep my drooping eyelids open wide,
Looking on darkness which the blind do see:
Save that my soul's imaginary sight
Presents thy shadow to my sightless view,
Which, like a jewel hung in ghastly night,
Makes black night beauteous and her old face new.
Lo, thus, by day my limbs, by night my mind,
For thee, and for myself, no quiet find.

Sonnet 43

When most I wink, then do mine eyes best see,
For all the day they view things unrespected;
But when I sleep, in dreams they look on thee,
And darkly bright, are bright in dark directed.
Then thou, whose shadow shadows doth make bright,
How would thy shadow's form form happy show
To the clear day with thy much clearer light,
When to unseeing eyes thy shade shines so!
How would, I say, mine eyes be blessed made
By looking on thee in the living day,
When in dead night thy fair imperfect shade
Through heavy sleep on sightless eyes doth stay!
All days are nights to see till I see thee,
And nights bright days when dreams do show thee me.

[↑](#)
Thomas Dekker (1572 – 1632)

Golden Slumbers

Golden slumbers kiss your eyes,
Smiles awake you when you rise;
Sleep, pretty wantons, do not cry,
And I will sing a lullaby,
Rock them, rock them, lullaby.

Care is heavy, therefore sleep you,
You are care, and care must keep you;
Sleep, pretty wantons, do not cry,
And I will sing a lullaby,
Rock them, rock them, lullaby.

[↑](#)
Anon (16th century)

At Night Lie Down (extract from an Elizabethan song)

At night lie down; prepare to have
Thy sleep, thy death, thy bed, thy grave.
Arise, awake, think that thou hast
Thy life but lent, thy breath a blast.

Let not the sluggish sleep
Close up thy waking eye,
Until with judgment deep
Thy daily deeds thou try:

He that one sin in conscience keeps
When he to quiet goes,
More venturous is than he who sleeps
Wirth twenty mortal foes.

[↑](#)
Anon (16th Century)

Weep You No More, Sad Fountains (An Elizabethan lyric set to music by John Dowland)

Weep you no more, sad fountains;
What need you flow so fast?
Look how the snowy mountains
Heaven's sun doth gently waste.

But my sun's heavenly eyes
View not your weeping,
That now lie sleeping
Softly, now softly lies
Sleeping.

Sleep is a reconciling,
A rest that peace begets;
Doth not the sun rise smiling
When fair at even he sets?
Rest you then, rest, sad eyes,
Melt not in weeping
While she lies sleeping,
Softly, now softly lies
Sleeping.

[↑](#)

John Fletcher (1579 – 1625)

Sleep

Come, Sleep, and with thy sweet deceiving
Lock me in delight awhile;
Let some pleasing dreams beguile
All my fancies; that from thence
I may feel an influence
All my powers of care bereaving!

Though but a shadow, but a sliding,
Let me know some little joy!
We that suffer long annoy
Are contented with a thought
Through an idle fancy wrought:
O let my joys have some abiding!

Care-Charming Sleep

Care-charming Sleep, thou easer of all woes,
Brother to Death, sweetly thyself dispose
On this afflicted prince; fall like a cloud
In gentle showers; give nothing that is loud
Or painful to his slumbers; easy, sweet,
And as a purling stream, thou son of Night,
Pass by his troubled senses; sing his pain,
Like hollow murmuring wind or silver rain;
Into this prince gently, oh gently slide,
And kiss him into slumbers like a bride.



Robert Herrick (1591 – 1674)

To Music, to becalm his Fever

Charm me asleep, and melt me so
With thy delicious numbers,
That, being ravish'd, hence I go
Away in easy slumbers.
Ease my sick head,
And make my bed,
Thou power that canst sever
From me this ill,
And quickly still,
Though thou not kill
My fever.

Thou sweetly canst convert the same
From a consuming fire
Into a gentle licking flame,
And make it thus expire.
Then make me weep
My pains asleep;
And give me such repose
That I, poor I,
May think thereby
I live and die
'Mongst roses.

Fall on me like the silent dew,
Or like those maiden showers
Which, by the peep of day, do strew
A baptim o'er the flowers.
Melt, melt my pains
With thy soft strains;
That, having ease me given,
With full delight
I leave this light,
And take my flight
For Heaven.

↑
John Milton (1608 – 1674)

Il Penseroso (extract)

And when the Sun begins to fling
His flaring beams, me, Goddess, bring
To archèd walks of twilight groves,
And shadows brown that Sylvan loves,
Of pine, or monumental oak,
Where the rude axe with heavèd stroke,
Was never heard the nymphs to daunt,
Or fright them from their hallow'd haunt.
There in close covert by some brook,
Where no profaner eye may look,
Hide me from day's garish eye,
While the bee with honeyed thigh,
That at her flowery work doth sing,
And the waters murmuring
With such consort as they keep,
Entice the dewy-feather'd Sleep;
And let some strange mysterious dream
Wave at his wings in airy stream
Of lively portraiture display'd,
Softly on my eye-lids laid.
And as I wake, sweet music breathe
Above, about, or underneath,
Sent by some spirit to mortals good,
Or the unseen Genius of the wood.

↑
Henry Vaughan (1621 – 1695)

The Morning Watch

O joys! Infinite sweetness! with what flowers,
And shoots of glory, my soul breaks, and buds
 All the long hours
 Of night, and rest,
 Through the still shrouds
 Of sleep, and clouds,
This dew fell on my breast;
 O how it blouds,
And spirits all my Earth! hark! In what rings,
And hymning circulations the quick world
 Awakes, and sings;
 The rising winds,
 And falling springs,
 Birds, beasts, all things
Adore him in their kinds.

Thus all is hurl'd
In sacred hymns, and order, the great chime
And symphony of nature. Prayer is
The world in tune,
A spirit-voice,
And vocal joys
Whose Echo is heaven's bliss.
O let me climb
When I lie down! The pious soul by night
Is like a clouded star, whose beams though said
To shed their light
Under some cloud
Yet are above,
And shine, and move
Beyond that misty shroud.
So in my bed
That Curtain'd grave, though sleep, like ashes, hide
My lamp, and life, both shall in thee abide.

↑

Isaac Watts (1674 – 1748)

'Tis the voice of the Sluggard

'Tis the voice of the Sluggard: I hear him complain,
'You have waked me too soon, I must slumber again.'
As the door on its hinges, so he on his bed,
Turns his sides, and his shoulders, and his heavy head.

'A little more sleep, and a little more slumber.'
Thus he wastes half his days, and his hours without number:
And when he gets up, he sits folding his hands,
Or walks about sauntering, or trifling he stands.

I passed by his garden, and saw the wild briar,
The thorn, and the thistle grow broader and higher:
The clothes that hang on him are turning to rags;
And his money still wastes, till he starves or he begs.

I made him a visit, still hoping to find
He had took better care for improving his mind:
He told me his dreams, talk'd of eating and drinking;
But he scarce reads his Bible, and never loves thinking.

Said I then to my heart, 'Here's a lesson for me,'
That man's but a picture of what I might be.
But thanks to my friends for their care in my breeding,
Who have taught me betimes to love working and reading.

[↑](#)
Edward Young (1683 – 1765)

Night Thoughts (extracts)

Tired Nature's sweet restorer, balmy Sleep!
He, like the world, his ready visit pays
Where Fortune smiles; the wretched he forsakes;
Swift on his downy pinion flies from woe,
And lights on lids unsullied with a tear.
From short (as usual) and disturb'd repose,
I wake: how happy they, who wake no more!
Yet that were vain, if dreams infest the grave.
I wake, emerging from a sea of dreams
Tumultuous; where my wreck'd desponding thought
From wave to wave of fancied misery
At random drove, her helm of reason lost.
Though now restored, 'tis only change of pain,
(A bitter change!) severer for severe:
The day too short for my distress; and night,
Even in the zenith of her dark domain,
Is sunshine to the colour of my fate.
Night, sable goddess! from her ebon throne,
In rayless majesty, now stretches forth
Her leaden sceptre o'er a slumbering world.
Silence, how dead! and darkness, how profound!
Nor eye, nor listening ear, an object finds;
Creation sleeps. 'Tis as the general pulse
Of life stood still, and nature made a pause...

...In every varied posture, place, and hour,
How widow'd every thought of every joy!
Thought, busy thought! too busy for my peace!
Through the dark postern of time long lapsed,
Led softly, by the stillness of the night,
Led, like a murderer, (and such it proves!)
Strays (wretched rover!) o'er the pleasing past;
In quest of wretchedness perversely strays;
And finds all desert now; and meets the ghosts
Of my departed joys; a numerous train!
I rue the riches of my former fate;
Sweet comfort's blasted clusters I lament;
I tremble at the blessings once so dear;
And every pleasure pains me to the heart....

...Sleep's dewy wand
Has stroked my drooping lips, and promises
My long arrear of rest; the downy god
(Wont to return with our returning peace)
Will pay, ere long, and bless me with repose.
Haste, haste, sweet stranger! from the peasant's cot,

The shipboy's hammock, or the soldier's straw,
Whence sorrow never chased thee; with thee bring,
Not hideous visions, as of late; but draughts
Delicious of well-tasted, cordial, rest;
Man's rich restorative; his balmy bath,
That supples, lubricates, and keeps in play
The various movements of this nice machine,
Which asks such frequent periods of repair.
When tired with vain rotations of the day,
Sleep winds us up for the succeeding dawn;
Fresh we spin on, till sickness clogs our wheels,
Or death quite breaks the spring, and motion ends.
When will it end with me?

↑

Thomas Warton Jr. (1728 – 1790)

Ode To Sleep

On this my pensive pillow, gentle Sleep!
Descend, in all thy downy plumage drest:
Wipe with thy wing these eyes that wake to weep,
And place thy crown of poppies on my breast.

O steep my senses in oblivion's balm,
And sooth my throbbing pulse with lenient hand;
This tempest of my boiling blood becalm!
Despair grows mild at thy supreme command.

Yet ah! in vain, familiar with the gloom,
And sadly toiling through the tedious night,
I seek sweet slumber, while that virgin bloom,
For ever hovering, haunts my wretched sight.

Nor would the dawning day my sorrows charm:
Black midnight and the blaze of noon alike
To me appear, while with uplifted arm
Death stands prepar'd, but still delays, to strike.

↑

Anna Seward (1742 – 1809)

Invocation, to the Genius of Slumber (extract)

Spirit of Dreams, that when the dark hours steep
In the soft dews of life-embalming sleep,
Our busy senses, canst restore the lost,
The loved, the mourn'd, from Death's mysterious coast,

Propitious lately to my votive lay,
And the lone musings of the joyless day,
From 'whelming years, and from sepulchral night,
Thou gav'st Honora to my slumbering sight:
Deck'd in those varied graces that array'd
In youth's first bloom, the fair ingenuous maid;
In all those pure affection's gladd'ning powers.
That wing'd with joy the animated hours,
Alike when her sweet converse welcome made
Morn's rising light, and Evening's stealthy shade;
The months with flowers adorn'd, with radiance warm
The vernal day, and e'en the wintry storm.
She looked, as in those golden years foregone,
Spoke, as when love attuned each melting tone...

Once, as the taper's steady light conveyed
Upon the white expanse the graceful shade
Of sweet Honora's face, the traces fair
My anxious hand pursued, and fixed them there;
To throw, in spite of Fate's remorseless crimes,
Soft soothing magic o'er succeeding times.
For this dear purpose, near my couch I placed
The shade, by Love assiduously traced;
And, while no sullen curtain drops between.
The image consecrates the sombrous scene;
Serenely sweet it stands, at morn, at eve,
The first, last object these fond eyes perceive
And still my heart, and oft my lips address
The shadowy form of her who lived to bless.

Now strikes the midnight clock; – the taper gleams
With the faint flash of half-expiring beams,
And soon that lovely semblance shall recede,
And Sleep's dim veils its thrilling powers impede.
I feel their balmy, kind, resistless charms
Creep o'er my closing eyes, – I fold my arms,
Breathing in murmurs thro' the paly gloom,
“Come to my dreams, my lost Honora, come!
Back as the waves of Time benignly roll,
Show thy bright face to my enchanted soul!”

Notes

Honora was Anna Seward's adopted sister, who died young.
The traces fair / My anxious hand pursued, and fixed them there – the poet drew a silhouette of Honora's face.

[↑](#)
William Blake (1757 – 1827)

Cradle Song

Sleep, sleep, beauty bright,
Dreaming in the joys of night;
Sleep, sleep; in thy sleep
Little sorrows sit and weep.

Sweet babe, in thy face
Soft desires I can trace,
Secret joys and secret smiles,
Little pretty infant wiles.

As thy softest limbs I feel
Smiles as of the morning steal
O'er thy cheek, and o'er thy breast
Where thy little heart doth rest.

O the cunning wiles that creep
In thy little heart asleep!
When thy little heart doth wake,
Then the dreadful night shall break.

Night

The sun descending in the west,
The evening star does shine;
The birds are silent in their nest,
And I must seek for mine.
The moon, like a flower,
In heaven's high bower,
With silent delight
Sits and smiles on the night.

Farewell, green fields and happy groves,
Where flocks have took delight.
Where lambs have nibbled, silent moves
The feet of angels bright;
Unseen they pour blessing,
And joy without ceasing,
On each bud and blossom,
And each sleeping bosom.

They look in every thoughtless nest,
Where birds are covered warm;
They visit caves of every beast,
To keep them all from harm.

If they see any weeping
That should have been sleeping,
They pour sleep on their head,
And sit down by their bed.

When wolves and tigers howl for prey,
They pitying stand and weep;
Seeking to drive their thirst away,
And keep them from the sheep.
But if they rush dreadful,
The angels, most heedful,
Receive each mild spirit,
New worlds to inherit.

And there the lion's ruddy eyes
Shall flow with tears of gold,
And pitying the tender cries,
And walking round the fold,
Saying, 'Wrath, by His meekness,
And, by His health, sickness
Is driven away
From our immortal day.

'And now beside thee, bleating lamb,
I can lie down and sleep;
Or think on Him who bore thy name,
Graze after thee and weep.
For, washed in life's river,
My bright mane for ever
Shall shine like the gold
As I guard o'er the fold.'

[↑](#)

Samuel Rogers (1763 – 1855)

The Sleeping Beauty

Sleep on, and dream of heaven awhile
Tho' shut so close thy laughing eyes,
Thy rosy lips still wear a smile
And move, and breathe delicious sighs!

Ah, now soft blushes tinge her cheeks
And mantle o'er her neck of snow;
Ah, now she murmurs, now she speaks
What most I wish – and fear to know!

She starts, she trembles, and she weeps!
Her fair hands folded on her breast:
–And now, how like a saint she sleeps!
A seraph in the realms of rest!

Sleep on secure! Above control
Thy thoughts belong to Heaven and thee;
And may the secret of thy soul
Remain within its sanctuary!



William Wordsworth (1770 – 1850)

To Sleep

Fond words have oft been spoken to thee, Sleep!
And thou hast had thy store of tenderest names;
The very sweetest, Fancy culls or frames,
When thankfulness of heart is strong and deep!
Dear Bosom-child we call thee, that dost steep
In rich reward all suffering; Balm that tames
All anguish; Saint that evil thoughts and aims
Takest away, and into souls dost creep,
Like to a breeze from heaven. Shall I alone,
I surely not a man ungently made,
Call thee worst Tyrant by which Flesh is crost?
Perverse, self-willed to own and to disown,
Mere slave of them who never for thee prayed,
Still last to come where thou art wanted most!

To Sleep

A flock of sheep that leisurely pass by,
One after one; the sound of rain, and bees
Murmuring; the fall of rivers, winds and seas,
Smooth fields, white sheets of water, and pure sky;
I have thought of all by turns, and yet do lie
Sleepless! and soon the small birds' melodies
Must hear, first uttered from my orchard trees;
And the first cuckoo's melancholy cry.
Even thus last night, and two nights more, I lay,
And could not win thee, Sleep! by any stealth:
So do not let me wear to-night away:
Without Thee what is all the morning's wealth?
Come, blessed barrier between day and day,
Dear mother of fresh thoughts and joyous health!

Michael Angelo in Reply to the Passage upon his Statue of Night Sleeping: 'Night Speaks'

Grateful is Sleep, my life in stone bound fast;
More grateful still: while wrong and shame shall last,
On me can Time no happier state bestow
Than to be left unconscious of the woe.
Ah then, lest you awaken me, speak low.
Grateful is Sleep, more grateful still to be
Of marble; for while shameless wrong and woe
Prevail, 'tis best to neither hear nor see.
Then wake me not, I pray you. Hush, speak low.
Come, gentle Sleep, Death's image tho' thou art,
Come share my couch, nor speedily depart;
How sweet thus living without life to lie,
Thus without death how sweet it is to die.

[↑](#)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772 – 1834)

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (part V, extract)

Oh sleep! it is a gentle thing,
Beloved from pole to pole!
To Mary Queen the praise be given!
She sent the gentle sleep from Heaven,
That slid into my soul.

The silly buckets on the deck,
That had so long remained,
I dreamt that they were filled with dew;
And when I awoke, it rained.

My lips were wet, my throat was cold,
My garments all were dank;
Sure I had drunken in my dreams,
And still my body drank.

I moved, and could not feel my limbs:
I was so light – almost
I thought that I had died in sleep,
And was a blessed ghost.

Dejection: an Ode (extract)

'Tis midnight, but small thoughts have I of sleep:
Full seldom may my friend such vigils keep!
Visit her, gentle Sleep! with wings of healing,
 And may this storm be but a mountain-birth,
May all the stars hang bright above her dwelling,
 Silent as though they watched the sleeping Earth!
 With light heart may she rise,
 Gay fancy, cheerful eyes,
 Joy lift her spirit, joy attune her voice;
To her may all things live, from pole to pole,
Their life the eddying of her living soul!

The Pains of Sleep

Ere on my bed my limbs I lay,
It hath not been my use to pray
With moving lips or bended knees;
But silently, by slow degrees,
My spirit I to Love compose,
In humble trust mine eye-lids close,
With reverential resignation
No wish conceived, no thought exprest,
Only a sense of supplication;
A sense o'er all my soul imprest
That I am weak, yet not unblest,
Since in me, round me, every where
Eternal strength and Wisdom are.

But yester-night I prayed aloud
In anguish and in agony,
Up-starting from the fiendish crowd
Of shapes and thoughts that tortured me:
A lurid light, a trampling throng,
Sense of intolerable wrong,
And whom I scorned, those only strong!
Thirst of revenge, the powerless will
Still baffled, and yet burning still!
Desire with loathing strangely mixed
On wild or hateful objects fixed.
Fantastic passions! maddening brawl!
And shame and terror over all!
Deeds to be hid which were not hid,
Which all confused I could not know
Whether I suffered, or I did:
For all seemed guilt, remorse or woe,
My own or others still the same
Life-stifling fear, soul-stifling shame.

So two nights passed: the night's dismay
Saddened and stunned the coming day.
Sleep, the wide blessing, seemed to me
Distemper's worst calamity.
The third night, when my own loud scream
Had waked me from the fiendish dream,
O'ercome with sufferings strange and wild,
I wept as I had been a child;
And having thus by tears subdued
My anguish to a milder mood,
Such punishments, I said, were due
To natures deepliest stained with sin,—
For aye entempesting anew
The unfathomable hell within,
The horror of their deeds to view,
To know and loathe, yet wish and do!
Such griefs with such men well agree,
But wherefore, wherefore fall on me?
To be loved is all I need,
And whom I love, I love indeed.

[↑](#)

Thomas Moore (1779 – 1852)

The Light of Other Days

Oft, in the stilly night,
Ere slumber's chain has bound me,
Fond Memory brings the light
Of other days around me:
The smiles, the tears
Of boyhood's years,
The words of love then spoken;
The eyes that shone,
Now dimm'd and gone,
The cheerful hearts now broken!
Thus, in the stilly night,
Ere slumber's chain has bound me,
Sad Memory brings the light
Of other days around me.

When I remember all
The friends, so link'd together,
I've seen around me fall
Like leaves in wintry weather,
I feel like one
Who treads alone
Some banquet-hall deserted,

Whose lights are fled,
Whose garlands dead,
And all but he departed!
Thus, in the stilly night,
Ere slumber's chain has bound me.
Sad Memory brings the light
Of other days around me.

[↑](#)

Emma (Hart) Willard (1787 – 1870: USA)

Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep

Rocked in the cradle of the deep
I lay me down in peace to sleep;
Secure I rest upon the wave,
For Thou, O Lord! hast power to save.
I know Thou wilt not slight my call,
For Thou dost mark the sparrow's fall;
And calm and peaceful shall I sleep,
Rocked in the cradle of the deep.

When in the dead of night I lie
And gaze upon the trackless sky,
The star-bespangled heavenly scroll,
The boundless waters as they roll,—
I feel Thy wondrous power to save
From perils of the stormy wave:
Rocked in the cradle of the deep,
I calmly rest and soundly sleep.

And such the trust that still were mine,
Though stormy winds swept o'er the brine,
Or though the tempest's fiery breath
Roused me from sleep to wreck and death.
In ocean cave, still safe with Thee
The germ of immortality,
And calm and peaceful shall I sleep,
Rocked in the cradle of the deep.



John Keats (1795 – 1821)

Sleep and Poetry (extract)

What is more gentle than a wind in summer?
What is more soothing than the pretty hummer
That stays one moment in an open flower,
And buzzes cheerily from bower to bower?
What is more tranquil than a musk-rose blowing
In a green island, far from all men's knowing?
More healthful than the leafiness of dales?
More secret than a nest of nightingales?
More serene than Cordelia's countenance?
More full of visions than a high romance?
What, but thee Sleep? Soft closer of our eyes!
Low murmurer of tender lullabies!
Light hoverer around our happy pillows!
Wreather of poppy buds, and weeping willows!
Silent entangler of a beauty's tresses!
Most happy listener! when the morning blesses
Thee for enlivening all the cheerful eyes
That glance so brightly at the new sun-rise.

To Sleep

O soft embalmer of the still midnight!
Shutting with careful fingers and benign
Our gloom-pleasèd eyes, embower'd from the light,
Enshaded in forgetfulness divine;
O soothest Sleep! if so it please thee, close,
In midst of this thine hymn, my willing eyes,
Or wait the amen, ere thy poppy throws
Around my bed its lulling charities;
Then save me, or the passèd day will shine
Upon my pillow, breeding many woes;
Save me from curious conscience, that still lords
Its strength for darkness, burrowing like a mole;
Turn the key deftly in the oilèd wards,
And seal the hushèd casket of my soul.

[↑](#)
Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806 – 1861)

The Sleep

‘He giveth his beloved sleep’: Ps. cxxvii. 2.

Of all the thoughts of God that are
Borne inward unto souls afar,
Along the Psalmist’s music deep,
Now tell me if that any is,
For gift or grace, surpassing this—
‘He giveth His beloved sleep’?

What would we give to our beloved?
The hero’s heart to be unmoved,
The poet’s star-tuned harp, to sweep,
The patriot’s voice, to teach and rouse,
The monarch’s crown, to light the brows?
He giveth His beloved, sleep.

What do we give to our beloved?
A little faith all undisproved,
A little dust to overweep,
And bitter memories to make
The whole earth blasted for our sake.
He giveth His beloved, sleep.

‘Sleep soft, beloved!’ we sometimes say,
But have no tune to charm away
Sad dreams that through the eye-lids creep.
But never doleful dream again
Shall break the happy slumber when
He giveth His beloved, sleep.

O earth, so full of dreary noises!
O men, with wailing in your voices!
O delvèd gold, the wailers heap!
O strife, O curse, that o’er it fall!
God strikes a silence through you all,
He giveth His beloved, sleep.

His dews drop mutely on the hill;
His cloud above it saileth still,
Though on its slope men sow and reap.
More softly than the dew is shed,
Or cloud is floated overhead,
He giveth His beloved, sleep.

Aye, men may wonder while they scan
A living, thinking, feeling man
Confirmed in such a rest to keep;
But angels say, and through the word
I think their happy smile is heard—
'He giveth His belovèd, sleep.'

For me, my heart that erst did go
Most like a tired child at a show,
That sees through tears the mummers leap,
Would now its wearied vision close,
Would child-like on His love repose,
Who giveth His belovèd, sleep.

And, friends, dear friends,—when it shall be
That this low breath is gone from me,
And round my bier ye come to weep,
Let One, most loving of you all,
Say, 'Not a tear must o'er her fall;
He giveth His belovèd, sleep.'

[↑](#)

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807 – 1882: USA)

Curfew

Solemnly, mournfully,
Dealing its dole,
The Curfew Bell
Is beginning to toll.

Cover the embers,
And put out the light;
Toil comes with the morning
And rest with the night.

Dark grow the windows,
And quenched is the fire;
Sound fades into silence,—
All footsteps retire.

No voice in the chambers,
No sound in the hall!
Sleep and oblivion
Reign over all!

The book is completed,
And closed, like the day;
And the hand that has written it
Lays it away.

Dim grow its fancies;
Forgotten they lie;
Like coals in the ashes,
They darken and die.

Song sinks into silence,
The story is told,
The windows are darkened,
The hearth-stone is cold.

Darker and darker
The black shadows fall;
Sleep and oblivion
Reign over all.



Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809 – 1892)

Sweet and Low

Sweet and low, sweet and low,
Wind of the western sea,
Low, low, breathe and blow,
Wind of the western sea!
Over the rolling waters go,
Come from the dying moon, and blow,
Blow him again to me;
While my little one, while my pretty one, sleeps.

Sleep and rest, sleep and rest,
Father will come to thee soon;
Rest, rest, on mother's breast,
Father will come to thee soon;
Father will come to his babe in the nest,
Silver sails all out of the west
Under the silver moon:
Sleep, my little one, sleep, my pretty one, sleep.

The Sleeping Beauty

Year after year unto her feet,
The while she slumbereth alone,
Over the purpled coverlet
□The maiden's jet black hair bath grown,
On either side her tranced form
Forth streaming from a braid of pearl:
The slumbrous light is rich and warm,
And moves not on the rounded curl.

The silk star-broider'd coverlid
Unto her limbs itself doth mould
Languidly ever; and, amid
Her full black ringlets downward roll'd,
Gloweth forth each softly-shadow'd arm,
With bracelets of the diamond bright:
Her constant beauty doth inform
Stillness with love, and day with light.

She sleeps: her breathings are not heard
In palace chambers far apart.
The fragrant tresses are not stirred
That lie upon her charmed heart.
She sleeps: on either hand upswells
The gold-fringed pillow lightly prest:
She sleeps, nor dreams, but ever dwells
A perfect form in perfect rest.

Song of the Lotos-Eaters (extract)

There is sweet music here that softer falls
Than petals from blown roses on the grass,
Or night-dews on still waters between walls
Of shadowy granite, in a gleaming pass;
Music that gentlier on the spirit lies
Than tired eyelids upon tired eyes;
Music that brings sweet sleep down from the blissful skies.
Here are cool mosses deep,
And thro' the moss the ivies creep,
And in the stream the long-leaved flowers weep,
And from the craggy ledge the poppy hangs in sleep.

[↑](#)

Charles Harpur (1813 – 68: Australia)

A Midsummer's Noon in the Australian Forest

Not a sound disturbs the air,
There is quiet everywhere;
Over plains and over woods
What a mighty stillness broods!

All the birds and insects keep
Where the coolest shadows sleep;
Even the busy ants are found
Resting in their pebbled mound;
Even the locust clingeth now
Silent to the barked bough:

Over hills and over plains
Quiet, vast and slumbrous, reigns.

Only there's a drowsy humming
From yon warm lagoon slow-coming:
'Tis the dragon-hornet – see!
All bedaubed resplendently
Yellow on a tawny ground–
Each rich spot not square nor round,
Rudely heart-shaped, as it were
The blurred and hasty impress there
Of a vermeil-crusted seal
Dusted o'er with golden meal.
Only there's a droning where
Yon bright beetle shines in air,
Tracks it in its gleaming flight
With a slanting beam of light
Rising in the sunshine higher,
Till its shards flame out like fire.

Every other thing is still,
Save the ever-wakeful rill,
Whose cool murmur only throws
Cooler comfort round repose;
Or some ripple in the sea,
Of leafy boughs, where, lazily,
Tired summer, in her bower
Turning with the noontide hour,
Heaves a slumbrous breath ere she
Once more slumbers peacefully.

Oh, 'tis easeful here to lie
Hidden from noon's scorching eye,
In this grassy cool recess
Musing thus of quietness.

[↑](#)

Emily Chubbuck Judson (1817 – 1854: USA)

Watching

Sleep, love, sleep!
The dusty day is done.
Lo! from afar the freshening breezes sweep
Wide over groves of balm,
Down from the towering palm,
In at the open casement cooling run,
And round thy lowly bed,
Thy bed of pain,

Bathing thy patient head,
Like grateful showers of rain,
They come;
While the white curtains, waving to and fro,
Fan the sick air;
And pitying the shadows come and go,
With gentle human care,
Compassionate and dumb.

The dusty day is done,
The night begun;
While prayerful watch I keep,
Sleep, love, sleep!
Is there no magic in the touch
Of fingers thou dost love so much?
Fain would they scatter poppies o'er thee now;
Or, with its mute caress,
The tremulous lip some soft nepenthe press
Upon thy weary lid and aching brow;
While prayerful watch I keep,
Sleep, love, sleep!

On the pagoda spire
The bells are swinging,
Their little golden circlet in a flutter
With tales the wooing winds have dared to utter
Till all are ringing,
As if a choir
Of golden-nested birds in heaven were singing;
And with a lulling sound
The music floats around,
And drops like balm into the drowsy ear;
Commingling with the hum
Of the Sepoy's distant drum,
And lazy beetle ever droning near.
Sounds these of deepest silence born,
Like night made visible by morn;
So silent that I sometimes start
To hear the throbbings of my heart,
And watch, with shivering sense of pain,
To see thy pale lids lift again.

The lizard, with his mouse-like eyes,
Peeps from the mortise in surprise
At such strange quiet after day's harsh din;
Then boldly ventures out,
And looks about,
And with his hollow feet
Treads his small evening beat,
Darting upon his prey
In such a tricky, winsome sort of way,

His delicate marauding seems no sin.
And still the curtains swing,
But noiselessly;
The bells a melancholy murmur ring,
And tears were in the sky:
More heavily the shadows fall,
Like the black foldings of a pall
Where juts the rough beam from the wall;
The candles flare
With fresher gusts of air;
The beetle's drone
Turns to a dirge-like, solitary moan;
Night deepens, and I sit in cheerless doubt, alone.

↑

Herman Melville (1819 – 1891: USA)

The Envable Isles

Through storms you reach them and from storms are free.
Afar descried, the foremost drear in hue,
But, nearer, green; and, on the marge, the sea
Makes thunder low and mist of rainbowed dew.

But, inland, – where the sleep that folds the hills
A dreamier sleep, the trance of God, instils,—
On uplands hazed, in wandering airs aswoon,
Slow-swaying palms salute love's cypress tree
Adown in vale where pebbly runlets croon
A song to lull all sorrow and all glee.

Sweet-fern and moss in many a glade are here,
Where, strown in flocks, what cheek-flushed myriads lie
Dimpling in dream, unconscious slumberers mere,
While billows endless round the beaches die.

↑

Richard Francis Burton (1821 – 1890)

In Sleep

Not drowsihood and dreams and mere idless,
Nor yet the blessedness of strength regained,
Alone are in what men call sleep. The past,
My unsuspected soul, my parents' voice,
The generations of my forbears, yea,
The very will of God himself are there
And potent-working: so that many a doubt
Is wiped away at daylight, many a soil

Washed cleanlier, many a puzzle riddled plain.
Strong, silent forces push my puny self
Towards unguessed issues, and the waking man
Rises a Greatheart where a Slave lay down.

[↑](#)

Thomas Lake Harris (1823 – 1906: USA)

Sea-Sleep

Sleep, sleep, sleep
In thy folded waves, O Sea!
Till the quiet breathings creep,
With a low-voiced melody,
Out of the glimmering deep.
For sleep is the close of life;
'Tis the end of love, and its birth;
'Tis the quieting of strife,
And the silencing of mirth.
Hush and sleep!

Close thou thy lids, O Sea,
On palaces and towers;
Dream on deliciously
Deep in thy dreamland bowers.
Waken us not again,
Beating upon our shore,
Rousing the strife in men
With full and thunderous roar.

Drop from thy crested heights,
To still repose and rest;
Fold us in hushed delights,
With dream-flowers from thy breast:
Not as the poppies are
But lilies cool, that weep
Tears that as kisses scar
To soothe for slumbers deep.

Hush thou the little waves,
Hush with a low-voiced song,
Till the Under-Deep that laves
Thy lucid floor lifts strong;
Till the Under-Word is borne
To this weary world of ours,
And lives, for love that mourn
Fold as the dew-dipped flowers.

Rest thou in time's unrest,
In the bloom-bell and the brain;
Then loose, all silver-tressed,
The streamings of thy mane:
Gliding, dissolving so,
That we at peace may be.
Sleep in thy silver glow,
Thy azure calm, O Sea;
Make lullaby!



Sydney Dobell (1824 – 74)

Fragment of a Sleep-Song

Sister Simplicitie,
Sing, sing a song to me,
Sing me to sleep.
Some legend low and long,
Slow as the summer song
Of the dull Deep.

Some legend long and low,
Whose equal ebb and flow
To and fro creep
On the dim marge of gray
'Tween the soul's night and day,
Washing "awake" away
Into "asleep."

Some legend low and long,
Never so weak or strong
As to let go
While it can hold this heart
Withouten sigh or smart,
Or as to hold this heart
When it sighs "No."

Some long low swaying song,
As the sway'd shadow long
Sways to and fro
Where, thro' the crowing cocks,
And by the swinging clocks,
Some weary mother rocks
Some weary woe.

Sing up and down to me
Like a dream-boat at sea,
So, and still so,
Float through the "then" and "when,"
Rising from when to then,
Sinking from then to when
While the waves go.

Low and high, high and low,
Now and then, then and now,
Now, now;
And when the now is then, and when the then is now,
And when the low is high, and when the high is low,
Low, low;
Let me float, let the boat
Go, go;
Let me glide, let me slide
Slow, slow;
Gliding boat, sliding boat,
Slow, slow;
Glide away, slide away
So, so.

[↑](#)

Helen Fiske Jackson (1830 – 1885: USA)

Morn

In what a strange bewilderment do we
Awake each morn from out the brief night's sleep.
Our struggling consciousness doth grope and creep
Its slow way back, as if it could not free
Itself from bonds unseen. Then Memory,
Like sudden light, outflashes from its deep
The joy or grief which it had last to keep
For us; and by the joy or grief we see
The new day dawneth like the yesterday;
We are unchanged; our life the same we knew
Before. I wonder if this is the way
We wake from death's short sleep, to struggle through
A brief bewilderment, and in dismay
Behold our life unto our old life true.

[↑](#)
Christina Rossetti (1830 – 1894)

There Remaineth Therefore a Rest for the People of God (Stanza I).

Come, blessed sleep, most full, most perfect, come:
Come, sleep, if so I may forget the whole;
Forget my body and forget my soul,
Forget how long life is and troublesome.
Come, happy sleep, to soothe my heart or numb,
Arrest my weary spirit or control;
Till light be dark to me from pole to pole,
And winds and songs and low echoes be dumb.
Come, sleep, and lap me into perfect calm,
Lap me from all the world and weariness;
Come, secret sleep, with thine unuttered psalm,
Safe sheltering in a hidden cool recess;
Come, heavy dreamless sleep, and close and press
Upon mine eyes thy fingers dropping balm.

[↑](#)
Emily Dickinson (1830 – 86: USA)

Sleep

Sleep is supposed to be,
By souls of sanity,
The shutting of the eye.

Sleep is the station grand
Down which on either hand
The hosts of witness stand!

Morn is supposed to be,
By people of degree,
The breaking of the day.

Morning has not occurred!
That shall aurora be
East of eternity;

One with the banner gay,
One in the red array,—
That is the break of day.



Roden Berkeley Wriothsley Noel (1834 – 94)

Sea Slumber-Song

Sea-birds are asleep,
The world forgets to weep,
Sea murmurs her soft slumber-song
On the shadowy sand
Of this elfin land;
“I, the Mother mild,
Hush thee, O my child,
Forget the voices wild!
Isles in elfin light
Dream, the rocks and caves,
Lull’d by whispering waves,
Veil their marbles bright,
Foam glimmers faintly white
Upon the shelly sand
Of this elfin land;
Sea-sound, like violins,
To slumber woos and wins,
I murmur my soft slumber-song,
Leave woes, and wails, and sins,
Ocean’s shadowy might
Breathes good-night,
 Good-night!”



John Leicester Warren (Lord de Tabley) (1835 – 1895)

Nuptial Song

Sigh, heart, and break not; rest, lark, and wake not!
 Day I hear coming to draw my Love away.
As mere-waves whisper, and clouds grow crisper,
 Ah, like a rose he will waken up with day!

In moon-light lonely, he is my Love only,
 I share with none when Luna rides in grey.
As dawn-beams quicken, my rivals thicken,
 The light and deed and turmoil of the day.

To watch my sleeper to me is sweeter,
 Than any waking words my Love can say;
In dream he finds me and closer winds me!
 Let him rest by me a little more and stay.

Ah, mine eyes, close not: and, tho' he knows not,
My lips, on his be tender while you may;
Ere leaves are shaken, and ring-doves waken,
And infant buds begin to scent new day.

Fair Darkness, measure thine hours, as treasure
Shed each one slowly from thine urn, I pray;
Hoard in and cover each from my lover;
I cannot lose him yet; dear night, delay!

Each moment dearer, true-love lie nearer,
My hair shall blind thee lest thou see the ray;
My locks encumber thine ears in slumber,
Lest any bird dare give thee note of day.

He rests so calmly; we lie so warmly;
Hand within hand, as children after play;—
In shafted amber on roof and chamber
Dawn enters; my Love wakens; here is day.

[↑](#)

Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837 – 1909)

Sleep

Sleep, when a soul that her own clouds cover
Wails that sorrow should always keep
Watch, nor see in the gloom above her
Sleep,

Down, through darkness naked and steep,
Sinks, and the gifts of his grace recover
Soon the soul, though her wound be deep.

God beloved of us, all men's lover,
All most weary that smile or weep
Feel thee afar or anear them hover,
Sleep.

[↑](#)
Margaret Thomson Janvier (1844 – 1913: USA)

The Sandman

The rosy clouds float overhead,
The sun is going down;
And now the sandman's gentle tread
Comes stealing through the town.
"White sand, white sand," he softly cries,
And as he shakes his hand,
Straightway there lies on babies' eyes
His gift of shining sand.
Blue eyes, gray eyes, black eyes, and brown,
As shuts the rose, they softly close, when he goes through the town.

From sunny beaches far away—
Yes, in another land—
He gathers up at break of day
His store of shining sand.
No tempests beat that shore remote,
No ships may sail that way;
His little boat alone may float
Within that lovely bay.
Blue eyes, gray eyes, black eyes, and brown,
As shuts the rose, they softly close, when he goes through the town.

He smiles to see the eyelids close
Above the happy eyes;
And every child right well he knows,—
Oh, he is very wise!
But if, as he goes through the land,
A naughty baby cries,
His other hand takes dull gray sand
To close the wakeful eyes.
Blue eyes, gray eyes, black eyes, and brown,
As shuts the rose, they softly close, when he goes through the town.

So when you hear the sandman's song
Sound through the twilight sweet,
Be sure you do not keep him long
A-waiting in the street.
Lie softly down, dear little head,
Rest quiet, busy hands,
Till, by your bed his good-night said,
He strews the shining sands.
Blue eyes, gray eyes, black eyes, and brown,
As shuts the rose, they softly close, when he goes through the town.



Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844 – 1899)

I wake and feel the fell of dark

I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day.
What hours, O what black hours we have spent
This night! what sights you, heart, saw; ways you went!
And more must, in yet longer light's delay.

With witness I speak this. But where I say
Hours I mean years, mean life. And my lament
Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent
To dearest him that lives alas! away.

I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree
Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me;
Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse.

Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours. I see
The lost are like this, and their scourge to be
As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse.



Robert Bridges (1844 – 1930)

Angel Spirits of Sleep

Angel spirits of sleep,
White-robed, with silver hair,
In your meadows fair,
Where the willows weep,
And the sad moonbeam
On the gliding stream
Writes her scattered dream:

Angel spirits of sleep,
Dancing to the weir
In the hollow roar
Of its waters deep;
Know ye how men say
That ye haunt no more
Isle and grassy shore
With your moonlit play;
That ye dance not here,
White-robed spirits of sleep,
All the summer night
Threading dances light?



Alexander Anderson (1845 – 1909: Scotland)

Cuddle Doon

(There is a glossary at the end of the poem.)

The bairnies cuddle doon at nicht
Wi' muckle faught an' din;
"Oh try and sleep, ye waukrife rogues,
Your faither's comin' in."
They never heed a word I speak;
I try to gie a froom,
But aye I hap them up an' cry,
"Oh, bairnies, cuddle doon."

Wee Jamie wi' the curly heid—
He aye sleeps next the wa'—
Bangs up an' cries, "I want a piece;"
The rascal starts them a'.
I rin an' fetch them pieces, drinks,
They stop awee the soun',
Then draw the blankets up an' cry,
"Noo, weanies, cuddle doon."

But, ere five minutes gang, wee Rab
Cries out, frae 'neath the claes,
"Mither, mak' Tam gie ower at ance,
He's kittlin' wi' his taes."
The mischief's in that Tam for tricks,
He'd bother half the toon;
But aye I hap them up and cry,
"Oh, bairnies, cuddle doon."

At length they hear their faither's fit,
An', as he steeks the door,
They turn their faces to the wa',
While Tam pretends to snore.
"Hae a' the weans been gude?" he asks,
As he pits aff his shoon;
"The bairnies, John, are in their beds,
An' lang since cuddled doon."

An' just afore we bed oorsels,
We look at our wee lambs;
Tam has his airm roun' wee Rab's neck,
And Rab his airm round Tam's.
I lift wee Jamie up the bed,
An' as I straik each croon,
I whisper, till my heart fills up,
"Oh, bairnies, cuddle doon."

The bairnies cuddle doon at nicht
Wi' mirth that's dear to me;
But soon the big warl's cark an' care
Will quaten doon their glee.
Yet, come what will to ilka ane,
May He who rules aboon
Aye whisper, though their pows be bald,
"Oh, bairnies, cuddle doon."

Glossary

bairnies/weans – children
muckle faught – much fighting
waukrife – wakeful
piece – sandwich, snack
steeks the door – closes the door
cark – worry, burden
pows – heads



Eugene Field (1850 – 1895: USA)

In the Firelight

The fire upon the hearth is low,
And there is stillness everywhere,
And, like winged spirits, here and there
The firelight shadows fluttering go.
And as the shadows round me creep,
A childish treble breaks the gloom,
And softly from a further room
Comes: "Now I lay me down to sleep."

And, somehow, with that little prayer
And that sweet treble in my ears,
My thought goes back to distant years,
And lingers with a dear one there;
And as I hear my child's amen,
My mother's faith comes back to me,—
Crouched at her side I seem to be,
And mother holds my hands again.

Oh for an hour in that dear place,
Oh for the peace of that dear time,
Oh for that childish trust sublime,
Oh for a glimpse of mother's face!
Yet, as the shadows round me creep,
I do not seem to be alone—
Sweet magic of that treble tone
And "Now I lay me down to sleep!"



Henry Van Dyke (1852 – 1933: USA)

Prayers for Sleep and Waking

I: Bedtime

Ere thou sleepest, gently lay
Every troubled thought away:
Put off worry and distress
As thou puttest off thy dress:
Drop thy burden and thy care
In the quiet arms of prayer.

*Lord, Thou knowest how I live,
All I've done amiss forgive:
All of good I've tried to do,
Strengthen, bless, and carry through,
All I love in safety keep,
While in Thee I fall asleep.*

II: Night Watch

If slumber should forsake
Thy pillow in the dark,
Fret not thyself to mark
How long thou liest awake.
There is a better way;
Let go the strife and strain,
Thine eyes will close again,
If thou wilt only pray.

*Lord, Thy peaceful gift restore,
Give my body sleep once more:
While I wait my soul will rest
Like a child upon Thy breast.*

↑
Maybury Fleming (1853 - ?: USA)

To Sleep

Sweet wooded way in life, forgetful Sleep!
Dim, drowsy realm where restful shadows fall,
And where the world's glare enters not at all,
Or in soft glimmer making rest more deep;
Where sound comes not, or else like brooks that keep
The world's noise out, as by a slumberous wall

Of gentlest murmur; where still whispers call
To smileless gladness those that waking weep;
Beneath the dense veil of thy stirless leaves,
Where no air is except the calm of space,
Vexed souls of men have grateful widow-hood
Of tedious sense; there thoughts are bound in sheaves
By viewless hands as silent as the place;
And man, unsinning, finds all nature good.

↑
Lewis Frank Tooker (1855 – 1925: USA)

Sleep

In a tangled, scented hollow,
On a bed of crimson roses,
Stilly now the wind reposes;
Hardly can the breezes borrow
Breath to stir the night-swept river.
Motionless the water-sedges,
And within the dusky hedges
Sounds no leaf's impatient shiver.
Sleep has come, that rare rest-giver.

Light and song have flown away
With the sun and twilight swallow;
Scarcely will the unknown morrow
Bring again so sweet a day.
Song was born of Joy and Thought;
Light, of Love and her caress.
Nothing's left me but a tress;
Death and Sleep the rest have wrought—
Death and Sleep, who came unsought.

[↑](#)
Rabindranath Tagore (1861 – 1941: India)

Gitanjali 24 – 25

If the day is done, if birds sing no more,
if the wind has flagged tired,
then draw the veil of darkness thick upon me,
even as thou hast wrapt the earth with the coverlet of sleep
and tenderly closed the petals of the drooping lotus at dusk.

From the traveller, whose sack of provisions
is empty before the voyage is ended,
whose garment is torn and dust-laden,
whose strength is exhausted,
remove shame and poverty, and renew his life like a flower
under the cover of thy kindly night.

*

In the night of weariness
let me give myself up to sleep without struggle,
resting my trust upon thee.

Let me not force my flagging spirit
into a poor preparation for thy worship.

It is thou who drawest the veil of night
upon the tired eyes of the day
to renew its sight in a fresher gladness of awakening.

Note

This extract is taken from the 1913 edition of *Gitanjali* in English, in which the poems were translated from the original Bengali by Tagore himself.

[↑](#)
Amy Levy (1861 – 1889)

The Promise Of Sleep

*Put the sweet thoughts from out thy mind,
The dreams from out thy breast;
No joy for thee – but thou shalt find
Thy rest*

All day I could not work for woe,
I could not work nor rest;
The trouble drove me to and fro,
Like a leaf on the storm's breast.

Night came and saw my sorrow cease;
Sleep in the chamber stole;
Peace crept about my limbs, and peace
Fell on my stormy soul.

And now I think of only this,—
How I again may woo
The gentle sleep – who promises
That death is gentle too.

[↑](#)

Robert Cameron Rogers (1862 – 1912: USA)

A Sleeping Priestess of Aphrodite

She dreams of Love upon the temple stair,—
About her feet the lithe green lizards play
In all the drowsy, warm, Sicilian air.

The winds have loosed the fillet from her hair,
Sea winds, salt-lipped, that laugh and seem to say,
“She dreams of Love, upon the temple stair.

“Then let us twine soft fingers, here and there,
Amid the gleaming threads that drift and stray
In all the drowsy, warm, Sicilian air,

“And let us weave of them a subtle snare
To cast about and bind her, as to-day
She dreams of Love, upon the temple stair.”

Alas, the madcap winds, – how much they dare!
They wove the web, and in their wanton way,
In all the drowsy, Sicilian air,

They bound her sleeping, in her own bright hair.
And as she slept came Love – and passed away,—
She dreams of Love, upon the temple stair.



Robert Fuller Murray (1863 – 1894)

Yet A Little Sleep

Beside the drowsy streams that creep
Within this island of repose,
Oh, let us rest from cares and woes,
Oh, let us fold our hands to sleep!

Is it ignoble, then, to keep
Awhile from where the rough wind blows,
And all is strife, and no man knows
What end awaits him on the deep?

The voyager may rest awhile,
When rest invites, and yet may be
Neither a sluggard nor a craven.
With strength renewed he quits the isle,
And putting out again to sea,
Makes sail for his desired haven.

Sleep flies me

Sleep flies me like a lover
Too eagerly pursued,
Or like a bird to cover
Within some distant wood,
Where thickest boughs roof over
Her secret solitude.

The nets I spread to snare her,
Although with cunning wrought,
Have only served to scare her,
And now she'll not be caught.
To those who best could spare her,
She ever comes unsought.

She lights upon their pillows;
She gives them pleasant dreams,
Grey-green with leaves of willows,
And cool with sound of streams,
Or big with tranquil billows,
On which the starlight gleams.

No vision fair entrances
My weary open eye,
No marvellous romances
Make night go swiftly by;

But only feverish fancies
Beset me where I lie.

The black midnight is steeping
The hillside and the lawn,
But still I lie unsleeping,
With curtains backward drawn,
To catch the earliest peeping
Of the desired dawn.

Perhaps, when day is breaking;
When birds their song begin,
And, worn with all night waking,
I call their music din,
Sweet sleep, some pity taking,
At last may enter in.

[↑](#)

Andrew ‘Banjo’ Paterson (1864 – 1941: Australia)

He Giveth His Beloved Sleep

The long day passes with its load of sorrow:
In slumber deep
I lay me down to rest until tomorrow—
Thank God for sleep.
Thank God for all respite from weary toiling,
From cares that creep
Across our lives like evil shadows, spoiling
God’s kindly sleep.

We plough and sow, and, as the hours grow later,
We strive to reap,
And build our barns, and hope to build them greater
Before we sleep.

We toil and strain and strive with one another
In hopes to heap
Some greater share of profit than our brother
Before we sleep.

What will it profit that with tears or laughter
Our watch we keep?
Beyond it all there lies the Great Hereafter!
Thank God for sleep!

For, at the last, beseeching Christ to save us
We turn with deep
Heartfelt thanksgiving unto God, who gave us
The Gift of Sleep.

↑
Richard Hovey (1864 – 1900: USA)

Voices of Unseen Spirits

From *Taliesin: a Masque*

Here falls no light of sun nor stars;
No stir nor striving here intrudes;
No moan nor merry-making mars
The quiet of these solitudes.

Submerged in sleep, the passive soul
Is one with all the things that seem;
Night blurs in one confused whole
Alike the dreamer and the dream.
O dwellers in the busy town!
For dreams you smile, for dreams you weep.
Come out, and lay your burdens down!
Come out; there is no God but Sleep.

Sleep, and renounce the vital day;
For evil is the child of life.
Let be the will to live, and pray
To find forgetfulness of strife.

Beneath the thicket of these leaves
No light discriminates each from each.
No Self that wrongs, no Self that grieves
Hath longer deed nor creed nor speech.

Sleep on the mighty Mother's breast!
Sleep, and no more be separate!
Then, one with Nature's ageless rest,
There shall be no more sin to hate.

↑
Agnes L. Storrie (1865 – 1936: Australia)

Twenty Gallons of Sleep

Measure me out from the fathomless tun
That somewhere or other you keep
In your vasty cellars, O wealthy one,
Twenty gallons of sleep.

Twenty gallons of balmy sleep,
Dreamless, and deep, and mild,
Of the excellent brand you used to keep
When I was a little child.

I've tasted of all your vaunted stock,
Your clarets and ports of Spain,
The liquid gold of your famous hock,
And your matchless dry champagne.

Of your rich muscats and your sherries fine,
I've drunk both well and deep;
Then measure me out, O merchant mine,
Twenty gallons of sleep.

Twenty gallons of slumber soft,
Of the innocent, baby kind,
When the angels flutter their wings aloft
And the pillow with down is lined.

I have drawn the corks, and drained the lees,
Of every vintage pressed;
If I've felt the sting of my honey bees,
I've taken it with the rest.

I have lived my life, and I'll not repine;
As I sowed I was bound to reap;
Then measure me out, O merchant mine,
Twenty gallons of sleep.



Rudyard Kipling (1865 – 1936)

The City of Sleep

Over the edge of the purple down,
Where the single lamplight gleams,
Know ye the road to the Merciful Town
That is hard by the Sea of Dreams—
Where the poor may lay their wrongs away,
And the sick may forget to weep?
But we – pity us! Oh, pity us!
We wakeful; ah, pity us!—
We must go back with Policeman Day—
Back from the City of Sleep!

Weary they turn from the scroll and crown,
Fetter and prayer and plough—
They that go up to the Merciful Town,
For her gates are closing now.
It is their right in the Baths of Night
Body and soul to steep,
But we – pity us! ah, pity us!
We wakeful; oh, pity us!—

We must go back with Policeman Day—
Back from the City of Sleep!

Over the edge of the purple down,
Ere the tender dreams begin,
Look – we may look – at the Merciful Town,
But we may not enter in!
Outcasts all, from her guarded wall
Back to our watch we creep:
We – pity us! ah, pity us!
We wakeful; oh, pity us!—
We that go back with Policeman Day—
Back from the City of Sleep!

↑

Arthur Symons (1865 – 1945)

Night and Wind

The night is light and chill,
Stars are awake in the sky,
There's a cloud over the moon;
Round the house on the hill
The wind creeps with its cry
Between a wail and a croon.

I hear the voice of the wind,
The voice of the wind in the night,
Cry and sob and weep,
As the voice of one that hath sinned
Moaning aloud in its might
In the night when he cannot sleep.

Sleep? No sleep is about.
What remembering sin
Wakes and watches apart?...
The wind wails without,
And my heart is wailing within,
And the wind is the voice of my heart.

↑

George William (“A. E.”) Russell (1867 – 1935: Ireland)

Carrowmore

It's a lonely road through bogland to the lake at Carrowmore,
And a sleeper there lies dreaming where the water laps the shore;
Though the moth-wings of the twilight in their purples are unfurled,
Yet his sleep is filled with music by the masters of the world.

There's a hand is white as silver that is fondling with his hair:
There are glimmering feet of sunshine that are dancing by him there:
And half-open lips of faery that were dyed a faery red
In their revels where the Hazel Tree its holy clusters shed.

"Come away," the red lips whisper, "all the world is weary now;
'Tis the twilight of the ages and it's time to quit the plough.
Oh, the very sunlight's weary ere it lightens up the dew,
And its gold is changed and faded before it falls to you.

"Though your colleen's heart be tender, a tenderer heart is near.
What's the starlight in her glances when the stars are shining clear?
Who would kiss the fading shadow when the flower-face glows above
'Tis the beauty of all Beauty that is calling for your love."

Oh, the great gates of the mountain have opened once again,
And the sound of song and dancing falls upon the ears of men,
And the Land of Youth lies gleaming, flushed with rainbow light and
mirth,
And the old enchantment lingers in the honey-heart of earth.

[↑](#)

Ernest Dowson (1867 – 1900)

Villanelle of Sunset

Come hither, child, and rest,
This is the end of day,
Behold the weary West!

Sleep rounds with equal zest
Man's toil and children's play,
Come hither, child, and rest.

My white bird, seek thy nest,
Thy drooping head down lay,
Behold the weary West!

Now eve is manifest
And homeward lies our way,
Behold the weary West!

Tired flower! upon my breast
I would wear thee alway,
Come hither, child, and rest—
Behold the weary West!



Anna Hempstead Branch (1875 – 1937: USA)

Songs for my Mother: her Hands

My mother's hands are cool and fair,
They can do anything.
Delicate mercies hide them there
Like flowers in the spring.

When I was small and could not sleep,
She used to come to me,
And with my cheek upon her hand
How sure my rest would be.
For everything she ever touched
Of beautiful or fine,
Their memories living in her hands
Would warm that sleep of mine.

Her hands remember how they played
One time in meadow streams,—
And all the flickering song and shade
Of water took my dreams.

Swift through her haunted fingers pass
Memories of garden things;—
I dipped my face in flowers and grass
And sounds of hidden wings.

One time she touched the cloud that kissed
Brown pastures bleak and far;—
I leaned my cheek into a mist
And thought I was a star.

All this was very long ago
And I am grown; but yet
The hand that lured my slumber so
I never can forget.

For still when drowsiness comes on
It seems so soft and cool,
Shaped happily beneath my cheek,
Hollow and beautiful.



Edward Thomas (1878 – 1917)

Lights Out

I have come to the borders of sleep,
The unfathomable deep
Forest where all must lose
Their way, however straight,
Or winding, soon or late;
They cannot choose.

Many a road and track
That, since the dawn's first crack,
Up to the forest brink,
Deceived the travellers,
Suddenly now blurs,
And in they sink.

Here love ends,
Despair, ambition ends;
All pleasure and all trouble,
Although most sweet or bitter,
Here ends in sleep that is sweeter
Than tasks most noble.

There is not any book
Or face of dearest look
That I would not turn from now
To go into the unknown
I must enter, and leave, alone,
I know not how.

The tall forest towers;
Its cloudy foliage lowers
Ahead, shelf above shelf;
Its silence I hear and obey
That I may lose my way
And myself.



Harold Monro (1879 - 1932)

While We Sleep

The earth takes up our bodies, every one,
And brings them slowly backward to the dark;
Then on her shadowed side we droop and slumber,
Turned from the sun.

(Meanwhile, He covers continents in light
One after other, so they stretch and wake,
Live their day through and droop again to slumber:
Day, night: day, night.)

The stars shine forth and disappear again,
Roaring about in space above our heads,
While we are folded to the earth in slumber
With dreaming brain.

We travel through the darkness: we are spun
Upward through rays of light into the morning;
We waken with the earth: we glide from slumber
Toward the sun.

At Night (The Silent Pool III)

At night we often go
With happy comrades to that real estate,
Where dreams in beauty grow,
And every man enjoys a common fate.

At night in sleep one flows
Below the surface of all argument;
The brain, with all it knows,
Is covered by the waters of content.

But when the dawn appears
Brain rises to the surface with a start,
And, waking, quickly sneers
At the old natural brightness of the heart.

Oh, that a man might choose
To live unconsciously like beast or bird,
And our clear thought not lose
Its beauty when we turn it into word.

[↑](#)
Louis V. Ledoux (1880 – 1948: USA)

Slumber Song

Drowsily come the sheep
From the place where the pastures be,
 By a dusty lane
 To the fold again,
First one, and then two, and three:
 First one, then two, by the paths of sleep
Drowsily come the sheep.

Drowsily come the sheep,
And the shepherd is singing low:
 After eight comes nine
 In the endless line,
They come, and then in they go.
 First eight, then nine, by the paths of sleep
Drowsily come the sheep.

Drowsily come the sheep
And they pass through the sheepfold door;
 After one comes two,
 After one comes two,
Comes two and then three and four.
 First one, then two, by the paths of sleep,
Drowsily come the sheep.

[↑](#)
D.H. Lawrence (1885 – 1930)

Embankment at Night, before the War: Outcasts

The night rain, dripping unseen,
Comes endlessly kissing my face and my hands.

The river, slipping between
Lamps, is rayed with golden bands
Half way down its heaving sides;
Revealed where it hides.

Under the bridge
Great electric cars
Sing through, and each with a floor-light racing along at its side.
Far off, oh, midge after midge
Drifts over the gulf that bars
The night with silence, crossing the lamp-touched tide.

At Charing Cross, here, beneath the bridge
Sleep in a row the outcasts,
Packed in a line with their heads against the wall.
Their feet, in a broken ridge
Stretch out on the way, and a lout casts
A look as he stands on the edge of this naked stall.

Beasts that sleep will cover
Their faces in their flank; so these
Have huddled rags or limbs on the naked sleep.
Save, as the tram-cars hover
Past with the noise of a breeze
And gleam as of sunshine crossing the low black heap,

Two naked faces are seen
Bare and asleep,
Two pale clots swept and swept by the light of the cars.
Foam-clots showing between
The long, low tidal-heap,
The mud-weed opening two pale, shadowless stars.

Over the pallor of only two faces
Passes the gallivant beam of the trams;
Shows in only two sad places
The white bare bone of our shams.

A little, bearded man, pale, peaked in sleeping,
With a face like a chickweed flower.
And a heavy woman, sleeping still keeping
Callous and dour.

Over the pallor of only two places
Tossed on the low, black, ruffled heap
Passes the light of the tram as it races
Out of the deep.

Eloquent limbs
In disarray
Sleep-suave limbs of a youth with long, smooth thighs
Hutched up for warmth; the muddy rims
Of trousers fray
On the thin bare shins of a man who uneasily lies.

The balls of five red toes
As red and dirty, bare
Young birds forsaken and left in a nest of mud—
Newspaper sheets enclose
Some limbs like parcels, and tear
When the sleeper stirs or turns on the ebb of the flood—

One heaped mound
Of a woman's knees
As she thrusts them upward under the ruffled skirt—
And a curious dearth of sound
In the presence of these
Wastrels that sleep on the flagstones without any hurt.

Over two shadowless, shameless faces
Stark on the heap
Travels the light as it tilts in its paces
Gone in one leap.

At the feet of the sleepers, watching,
Stand those that wait
For a place to lie down; and still as they stand, they sleep,
Wearily catching
The flood's slow gait
Like men who are drowned, but float erect in the deep.

Oh, the singing mansions,
Golden-lighted tall
Trams that pass, blown ruddily down the night!
The bridge on its stanchions
Stoops like a pall
To this human blight.

On the outer pavement, slowly,
Theatre people pass,
Holding aloft their umbrellas that flash and are bright
Like flowers of infernal moly
Over nocturnal grass
Wetly bobbing and drifting away on our sight.
And still by the rotten
Row of shattered feet,
Outcasts keep guard.
Forgotten,
Forgetting, till fate shall delete
One from the ward.

The factories on the Surrey side
Are beautifully laid in black on a gold-grey sky.
The river's invisible tide
Threads and thrills like ore that is wealth to the eye.

And great gold midges
Cross the chasm
At the bridges
Above intertwined plasm.

↑
Rupert Brooke (1887 – 1915)

The Charm

In darkness the loud sea makes moan;
And earth is shaken, and all evils creep
About her ways.

Oh, now to know you sleep!
Out of the whirling blinding moil, alone,
Out of the slow grim fight,
One thought to wing – to you, asleep,
In some cool room that's open to the night
Lying half-forward, breathing quietly,
One white hand on the white
Unrumpled sheet, and the ever-moving hair
Quiet and still at length!...

Your magic and your beauty and your strength,
Like hills at noon or sunlight on a tree,
Sleeping prevail in earth and air.

In the sweet gloom above the brown and white
Night benedictions hover; and the winds of night
Move gently round the room, and watch you there.
And through the dreadful hours
The trees and waters and the hills have kept
The sacred vigil while you slept,
And lay a way of dew and flowers
Where your feet, your morning feet, shall tread.
And still the darkness ebbs about your bed.
Quiet, and strange, and loving-kind, you sleep.
And holy joy about the earth is shed;
And holiness upon the deep.

↑
Isaac Rosenberg (1890 - 1918)

Sleep

Godhead's lip hangs
When our pulses have no golden tremors,
And his whips are flicked by mice
And all star-amorous things.

Drops, drops of shivering quiet
Filter under my lids.
Now only am I powerful.
What though the cunning gods outwit us here
In daytime and in playtime,

Surely they feel the gyves we lay on them
In our sleep.

O, subtle gods lying hidden!
O, gods with your oblique eyes!
Your elbows in the dawn, and wrists
Bright with the afternoon,
Do you not shake when a mortal slides
Into your own unvexed peace?
When a moving stillness breaks over your knees
(An emanation of piled aeons' pressure)
From our bodies flat and straight,
And your limbs are locked,
Futilely God's,
And shut your sinister essences.



Robert Nichols (1893 – 1944)

Night Rhapsody (extract)

How beautiful it is to wake at night,
When over all there reigns the ultimate spell
Of complete silence, darkness absolute,
To feel the world, tilted on axle-tree,
In slow gyration, with no sensible sound,
Unless to ears of unimagined beings,
Resident incorporeal or stretched
In vigilance of ecstasy among
Ethereal paths and the celestial maze.
The rumour of our onward course now brings
A steady rustle, as of some strange ship
Darkling with soundless sail all set and amply filled
By volume of an ever-constant air,
At fullest night, through seas for ever calm,
Swept lovely and unknown for ever on.

How beautiful it is to wake at night,
Embalmed in darkness watchful, sweet, and still,
As is the brain's mood flattered by the swim
Of currents circumvolvent in the void,
To lie quite still and to become aware
Of the dim light cast by nocturnal skies
On a dim earth beyond the window-ledge,
So, isolate from the friendly company
Of the huge universe which turns without,
To brood apart in calm and joy awhile
Until the spirit sinks and scarcely knows
Whether self is, or if self only is,
For ever....

How beautiful to wake at night,
Within the room grown strange, and still, and sweet,
And live a century while in the dark
The dripping wheel of silence slowly turns;
To watch the window open on the night,
A dewy silent deep where nothing stirs,
And, lying thus, to feel dilate within
The press, the conflict, and the heavy pulse
Of incommunicable sad ecstasy,
Growing until the body seems outstretched
In perfect crucifixion on the arms
Of a cross pointing from last void to void,
While the heart dies to a mere midway spark.

↑

William P.R. Kerr (dates unknown: fl. 1922)

Counting Sheep

Half-awake I walked
A dimly-seen sweet hawthorn lane
Until sleep came;
I lingered at a gate and talked
A little with a lonely lamb.
He told me of the great still night,
Of calm starlight,
And of the lady moon, who'd stoop
For a kiss sometimes;
Of grass as soft as sleep, of rhymes
The tired flowers sang:
The ageless April tales
Of how, when sheep grew old,
As their faith told,
They went without a pang
To far green fields, where fall
Perpetual streams that call
To deathless nightingales.
And then I saw, hard by,
A shepherd lad with shining eyes,
And round him gathered one by one
Countless sheep, snow-white;
More and more they crowded
With tender cries,
Till all the field was full
Of voices and of coming sheep.
Countless they came, and I
Watched, until deep
As dream-fields lie
I was asleep.

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