

The Dream

Lord Byron



Walker & Co. del. & sculp. Ph. A.

Mary Chaworth.

INTRODUCTION TO *THE DREAM*

The Dream, which was written at Diodati in July, 1816 (probably towards the end of the month; see letters to Murray and Rogers, dated July 22 and July 29), is a retrospect and an apology. It consists of an opening stanza, or section, on the psychology of dreams, followed by some episodes or dissolving views, which purport to be the successive stages of a dream. Stanzas ii. and iii. are descriptive of Annesley Park and Hall, and detail two incidents of Byron's boyish passion for his neighbour and distant cousin, Mary Anne Chaworth. The first scene takes place on the top of "Diadem Hill," the "cape" or rounded spur of the long ridge of Howatt Hill, which lies about half a mile to the south-east of the hall. The time is the late summer or early autumn of 1803. The "Sun of Love" has not yet declined, and the "one beloved face" is still shining on him; but he is beginning to realize that "her sighs are not for him," that she is out of his reach. The second scene, which belongs to the following year, 1804, is laid in the "antique oratory" (not, as Moore explains, another name for the hall, but "a small room built over the porch, or principal entrance of the hall, and looking into the courtyard"), and depicts the final parting. His doom has been pronounced, and his first impulse is to pen some passionate reproach, but his heart fails him at the sight of the "Lady of his Love," serene and smiling, and he bids her farewell with smiles on his lips, but grief unutterable in his heart.

Stanza iv. recalls an incident of his Eastern travels—a halt at noonday by a fountain on the route from Smyrna to Ephesus (March 14, 1810), "the heads of camels were seen peeping above the tall reeds" (see *Travels in Albania*, 1858, ii. 59.).

The next episode (stanza v.) depicts an imaginary scene, suggested, perhaps, by some rumour or more definite assurance, and often present to his "inward eye"—the "one beloved," the mother of a happy family, but herself a forsaken and unhappy wife.

He passes on (stanza vi.) to his marriage in 1815, his bride "gentle" and "fair," but *not* the "one beloved,"—to the wedding day, when he stood before an altar, "like one forlorn," confused by the sudden vision of the past fulfilled with Love the "indestructible"!

In stanza vii. he records and analyzes the “sickness of the soul,” the so-called “phrenzy” which had overtaken and changed the “Lady of his Love;” and, finally (stanza viii.), he lays bare the desolation of his heart, depicting himself as at enmity with mankind, but submissive to Nature, the “Spirit of the Universe,” if, haply, there may be “reserved a blessing” even for him, the rejected and the outlaw.

Moore says (*Life*, p. 321) that *The Dream* cost its author “many a tear in writing”—being, indeed, the most mournful as well as picturesque “story of a wandering life” that ever came from the pen and heart of man. In his *Real Lord Byron* (i. 284) Mr. Cordy Jeaffreson maintains that *The Dream* “has no autobiographical value. . . . A dream it was, as false as dreams usually are.” The character of the poet, as well as the poem itself, suggests another criticism. Byron suffered or enjoyed vivid dreams, and, as poets will, shaped his dreams, consciously and of set purpose, to the furtherance of his art, but nothing concerning himself interested him or awoke the slumbering chord which was not based on actual fact. If the meeting on the “cape crowned with a peculiar diadem,” and the final interview in the “antique oratory” had never happened or happened otherwise; if he had not “quivered” during the wedding service at Seaham; if a vision of Annesley and Mary Chaworth had not flashed into his soul,—he would have taken no pleasure in devising these incidents and details, and weaving them into a fictitious narrative. He took himself too seriously to invent and dwell lovingly on the acts and sufferings of an imaginary Byron. *The Dream* is “picturesque” because the accidents of the scenes are dealt with not historically, but artistically, are omitted or supplied according to poetical licence; but the record is neither false, nor imaginary, nor unusual. On the other hand, the composition and publication of the poem must be set down, if not to malice and revenge, at least to the preoccupation of chagrin and remorse, which compelled him to take the world into his confidence, cost what it might to his own self-respect, or the peace of mind and happiness of others.

For an elaborate description of Annesley Hall and Park, written with a view to illustrate *The Dream*, see “A Byronian Ramble,” Part II., the *Athenæum*, August 30, 1834. See, too, an interesting quotation from Sir Richard Phillips’ unfinished *Personal Tour through the United Kingdom*, published in the *Mirror*, 1828, vol. xii. p. 286; *Abbotsford and Newstead Abbey*, by Washington Irving, 1835, p. 191, *seq.*; *The House and Grave of Byron*, 1855; and an article in *Lippincott’s*

Magazine, 1876, vol. xviii. pp. 637, *seq.*

THE DREAM

I.

Our life is twofold: Sleep hath its own world,
A boundary between the things misnamed
Death and existence: Sleep hath its own world,
And a wide realm of wild reality,
And dreams in their developement have breath,
And tears, and tortures, and the touch of Joy;
They leave a weight upon our waking thoughts,
They take a weight from off our waking toils,
They do divide our being;¹ they become
A portion of ourselves as of our time,
And look like heralds of Eternity;
They pass like spirits of the past,—they speak
Like Sibyls of the future; they have power—
The tyranny of pleasure and of pain;
They make us what we were not—what they will,
And shake us with the vision that's gone by,²
The dread of vanished shadows—Are they so?
Is not the past all shadow?—What are they?
Creations of the mind?—The mind can make
Substance, and people planets of its own
With beings brighter than have been, and give
A breath to forms which can outlive all flesh.³
I would recall a vision which I dreamed

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Perchance in sleep—for in itself a thought,
A slumbering thought, is capable of years,
And curdles a long life into one hour.4

II.

I saw two beings in the hues of youth
Standing upon a hill, a gentle hill,
Green and of mild declivity, the last
As 'twere the cape of a long ridge of such,
Save that there was no sea to lave its base,
But a most living landscape, and the wave
Of woods and cornfields, and the abodes of men
Scattered at intervals, and wreathing smoke
Arising from such rustic roofs;—the hill
Was crowned with a peculiar diadem
Of trees, in circular array, so fixed,
Not by the sport of nature, but of man:
These two, a maiden and a youth, were there
Gazing—the one on all that was beneath
Fair as herself—but the Boy gazed on her;
And both were young, and one was beautiful:
And both were young—yet not alike in youth.
As the sweet moon on the horizon's verge,
The Maid was on the eve of Womanhood;
The Boy had fewer summers, but his heart
Had far outgrown his years, and to his eye
There was but one beloved face on earth,

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And that was shining on him: he had looked

Upon it till it could not pass away;

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He had no breath, no being, but in hers;

She was his voice; he did not speak to her,

But trembled on her words; she was his sight,⁵

For his eye followed hers, and saw with hers,

Which coloured all his objects:—he had ceased

To live within himself; she was his life,

The ocean to the river of his thoughts,⁶

Which terminated all: upon a tone,

A touch of hers, his blood would ebb and flow,⁷

And his cheek change tempestuously—his heart

60

Unknowing of its cause of agony.

But she in these fond feelings had no share:

Her sighs were not for him; to her he was

Even as a brother—but no more; 'twas much,

For brotherless she was, save in the name

Her infant friendship had bestowed on him;

Herself the solitary scion left

Of a time-honoured race.⁸—It was a name

Which pleased him, and yet pleased him not—and why?

Time taught him a deep answer—when she loved

70

Another: even *now* she loved another,

And on the summit of that hill she stood

Looking afar if yet her lover's steed⁹

Kept pace with her expectancy, and flew.

A change came o'er the spirit of my dream.
 There was an ancient mansion, and before
 Its walls there was a steed caparisoned:
 Within an antique Oratory stood
 The Boy of whom I spake;—he was alone,¹⁰
 And pale, and pacing to and fro: anon 80
 He sate him down, and seized a pen, and traced
 Words which I could not guess of; then he leaned
 His bowed head on his hands, and shook as 'twere
 With a convulsion—then arose again,
 And with his teeth and quivering hands did tear
 What he had written, but he shed no tears.
 And he did calm himself, and fix his brow
 Into a kind of quiet: as he paused,
 The Lady of his love reentered there;
 She was serene and smiling then, and yet 90
 She knew she was by him beloved—she knew,
 For quickly comes such knowledge,¹¹ that his heart
 Was darkened with her shadow, and she saw
 That he was wretched, but she saw not all.
 He rose, and with a cold and gentle grasp
 He took her hand; a moment o'er his face
 A tablet of unutterable thoughts
 Was traced, and then it faded, as it came;
 He dropped the hand he held, and with slow steps

Retired, but not as bidding her adieu,
For they did part with mutual smiles; he passed
From out the massy gate of that old Hall,
And mounting on his steed he went his way;
And ne'er repassed that hoary threshold more.¹²

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IV.

A change came o'er the spirit of my dream.
The Boy was sprung to manhood: in the wilds
Of fiery climes he made himself a home,
And his Soul drank their sunbeams: he was girt
With strange and dusky aspects; he was not
Himself like what he had been; on the sea
And on the shore he was a wanderer;
There was a mass of many images
Crowded like waves upon me, but he was
A part of all; and in the last he lay
Reposing from the noontide sultriness,
Couched among fallen columns, in the shade
Of ruined walls that had survived the names
Of those who reared them; by his sleeping side
Stood camels grazing, and some goodly steeds
Were fastened near a fountain; and a man
Clad in a flowing garb did watch the while,
While many of his tribe slumbered around:
And they were canopied by the blue sky,
So cloudless, clear, and purely beautiful,

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That God alone was to be seen in Heaven.¹³

V.

A change came o'er the spirit of my dream.
The Lady of his love was wed with One
Who did not love her better:—in her home,
A thousand leagues from his,—her native home,
She dwelt, begirt with growing Infancy,
Daughters and sons of Beauty,—but behold!
Upon her face there was the tint of grief,
The settled shadow of an inward strife,
And an unquiet drooping of the eye,
As if its lid were charged with unshed tears.¹⁴

130

What could her grief be?—she had all she loved,
And he who had so loved her was not there
To trouble with bad hopes, or evil wish,
Or ill-repressed affliction, her pure thoughts.
What could her grief be?—she had loved him not,
Nor given him cause to deem himself beloved,
Nor could he be a part of that which preyed
Upon her mind—a spectre of the past.

140

VI.

A change came o'er the spirit of my dream.
The Wanderer was returned.—I saw him stand
Before an Altar—with a gentle bride;
Her face was fair, but was not that which made
The Starlight¹⁵ of his Boyhood;—as he stood

Even at the altar, o'er his brow there came
The self-same aspect, and the quivering shock¹⁶ 150
That in the antique Oratory shook
His bosom in its solitude; and then—
As in that hour—a moment o'er his face
The tablet of unutterable thoughts
Was traced,—and then it faded as it came,
And he stood calm and quiet, and he spoke
The fitting vows, but heard not his own words,
And all things reeled around him; he could see
Not that which was, nor that which should have been—
But the old mansion, and the accustomed hall, 160
And the remembered chambers, and the place,
The day, the hour, the sunshine, and the shade,
All things pertaining to that place and hour
And her who was his destiny, came back
And thrust themselves between him and the light:
What business had they there at such a time?

VII.

A change came o'er the spirit of my dream.
The Lady of his love;—Oh! she was changed
As by the sickness of the soul; her mind
Had wandered from its dwelling, and her eyes 170
They had not their own lustre, but the look
Which is not of the earth; she was become
The Queen of a fantastic realm; her thoughts

Were combinations of disjointed things;
And forms, impalpable and unperceived
Of others' sight, familiar were to hers.
And this the world calls frenzy; but the wise
Have a far deeper madness—and the glance
Of melancholy is a fearful gift;
What is it but the telescope of truth?
Which strips the distance of its fantasies,
And brings life near in utter nakedness,
Making the cold reality too real!¹⁷

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VIII.

A change came o'er the spirit of my dream.
The Wanderer was alone as heretofore,
The beings which surrounded him were gone,
Or were at war with him; he was a mark
For blight and desolation, compassed round
With Hatred and Contention; Pain was mixed
In all which was served up to him, until,
Like to the Pontic monarch of old days,¹⁸
He fed on poisons, and they had no power,
But were a kind of nutriment; he lived
Through that which had been death to many men,
And made him friends of mountains:¹⁹ with the stars
And the quick Spirit of the Universe²⁰
He held his dialogues; and they did teach
To him the magic of their mysteries;

190

To him the book of Night was opened wide,
And voices from the deep abyss revealed²¹
A marvel and a secret—Be it so.

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IX.

My dream was past; it had no further change.
It was of a strange order, that the doom
Of these two creatures should be thus traced out
Almost like a reality—the one
To end in madness—both in misery.

July, 1816.

[First Published, The Prisoner Of Chillon, Etc., 1816.]

¹ [Compare—

“Come, blessed barrier between day and day.”

² [Compare—

“ . . . the night’s dismay

Saddened and stunned the coming day.”

*THE PAINS OF SLEEP, LINES 33, 34, BY S. T. COLERIDGE, POETICAL WORKS,
1893, P. 170.]*

³ [Compare *Childe Harold*, Canto III. stanza vi. lines 1–4, note, *Poetical Works*, 1899, ii. 219.]

⁴ [Compare—

“With us acts are exempt from time, and we
Can crowd eternity into an hour.”

CAIN, ACT I. SC. 1]

⁵ [Compare—

“Thou art my life, my love, my heart,

The very eyes of me."

TO ANTHEA, ETC., BY ROBERT HERRICK.]

⁶ [Compare—

" . . . the river of your love,

Must in the ocean of your affection

To me, be swallowed up."

MASSINGER'S *UNNATURAL COMBAT*, ACT III. SC. 4.]

⁷ [Compare—

"The hot blood ebbed and flowed again."

PARISINA, LINE 226, *POETICAL WORKS*, 1900, III. 515.]

⁸ ["Annesley Lordship is owned by Miss Chaworth, a minor heiress of the Chaworth family."—Throsby's *Thoroton's History of Nottinghamshire*, 1797, ii. 270.]

⁹ ["Moore, commenting on this (*Life*, p. 28), tells us that the image of the lover's steed was suggested by the Nottingham race-ground . . . nine miles off, and . . . lying in a hollow, and totally hidden from view. . . . Mary Chaworth, in fact, was looking for her lover's steed along the road as it winds up the common from Hucknall."—"A Byronian Ramble," *Athenæum*, No. 357, August 30, 1834.]

¹⁰ [Moore (*Life*, p. 28) regards "the antique oratory," as a poetical equivalent for Annesley Hall; but *vide ante*, the Introduction to *The Dream*, p. 31.]

¹¹ [Compare—

"Love by the object loved is soon discerned."

STORY OF RIMINI, BY LEIGH HUNT, CANTO III. ED. 1844, P. 22.

The line does not occur in the first edition, published early in 1816, or, presumably, in the MS. read by Byron in the preceding year. (See Letter to Murray, November 4, 1815.)]

¹² [Byron once again revisited Annesley Hall in the autumn of 1808 (see his lines, "Well, thou art happy," and "To a Lady," etc., *Poetical Works*, 1898, i. 277, 282, note 1); but it is possible that he avoided the "massy gate" ("arched over and surmounted by a clock and cupola") of set purpose, and entered by another way. He would not lightly or gladly have taken a liberty with the actual prosaic facts in a matter which so nearly concerned his personal emotions (*vide ante*, the Introduction to *The Dream*, p. 31).]

¹³ ["This is true *keeping*—an Eastern picture perfect in its foreground, and distance, and sky, and no part of which is so dwelt upon or laboured as to obscure the principal figure."—Sir Walter Scott, *Quarterly Review*, No. xxxi. "Byron's Dream" is the subject of a well-known picture by Sir Charles Eastlake.]

¹⁴ [Compare—

"Then Cythna turned to me and from her eyes

Which swam with unshed tears," etc.

SHELLY'S *REVOLT OF ISLAM* ("LAON AND CYTHNA"), CANTO XII. STANZA XXII.
LINES 2, 3, *POETICAL WORKS*, 1829, P. 48.]

¹⁵ [An old servant of the Chaworth family, Mary Marsden, told Washington Irving (*Abbotsford and Newstead Abbey*, 1835, p. 204) that Byron used to call Mary Chaworth "his bright morning star of Annesley." Compare the well-known lines—

"She was a form of Life and Light,
That, seen, became a part of sight;
And rose, where'er I turned mine eye,
The Morning-star of Memory!"

THE GIAOUR, LINES 1127–1130, *POETICAL WORKS*, 1900, III. 136,
137.]

¹⁶ ["This touching picture agrees closely, in many of its circumstances, with Lord Byron's own prose account of the wedding in his Memoranda; in which he describes himself as waking, on the morning of his marriage, with the most melancholy reflections, on seeing his wedding-suit spread out before him. In the same mood, he wandered about the grounds alone, till he was summoned for the ceremony, and joined, for the first time on that day, his bride and her family. He knelt down—he repeated the words after the clergyman; but a mist was before his eyes—his thoughts were elsewhere: and he was but awakened by the congratulations of the bystanders to find that he was—married."—*Life*, p. 272.

Medwin, too, makes Byron say (*Conversations, etc.*, 1824, p. 46) that he "trembled like a leaf, made the wrong responses, and after the ceremony called her (the bride) Miss Milbanke." All that can be said of Moore's recollection of the "memoranda," or Medwin's repetition of so-called conversations (reprinted almost *verbatim* in *Life, Writings, Opinions, etc.*, 1825, ii. 227, *seq.*, as "Recollections of the Lately Destroyed Manuscript," etc.), is that they tend to show that Byron meant *The Dream* to be taken literally as a record of actual events. He would not have forgotten by July, 1816, circumstances of great import which had taken place in December, 1815: and he's either lying of malice prepense or telling "an ower true tale."]

¹⁷ [Compare—

"Who loves, raves—'tis youth's frenzy—but the cure
Is bitterer still, as charm by charm unwinds
Which robed our idols, and we see too sure
Nor Worth nor Beauty dwells from out the mind's
Ideal shape of such."

CHILDE HAROLD, CANTO IV. STANZA CXXIII. LINES 1–5, *POETICAL WORKS*,
1899, II. 420.]

¹⁸ Mithridates of Pontus. [Mithridates, King of Pontus (B.C. 120–63), surnamed Eupator, succeeded to the throne when he was only eleven years of age. He is said to have safeguarded himself against the designs of his enemies by drugging himself with antidotes against poison, and so effectively that, when he was an old man, he could not poison himself, even when he was minded to do so—"ut ne volens quidem senex veneno mori potuerit."—Justinus, *Hist.*, lib. xxxvii. cap. ii.

According to Medwin (*Conversations*, p. 148), Byron made use of the same illustration in

speaking of Polidori's death (April, 1821), which was probably occasioned by "poison administered to himself" (see *Letters*, 1899, iii. 285).]

¹⁹ [Compare—

"Where rose the mountains, there to him were friends."

CHILDE HAROLD, CANTO III. STANZA XIII. LINE 1.

". . . and to me

High mountains are a feeling."

IBID., STANZA LXXII. LINES 2,3, *POETICAL WORKS*, 1899, II. 223, 261.]

²⁰ [Compare—

"Ye Spirits of the unbounded Universe!"

MANFRED, ACT I. SC. 1, LINE 29, *VIDE POST*, P. 86.]

²¹ [Compare *Manfred*, act ii. sc. 2, lines 79–91; and *ibid.*, act iii. sc. 1, lines 34–39; and sc. 4, lines 112–117, *vide post*, pp. 105, 121, 135.]