Fuseli, Another Nightmare: *The Night-Hag Visiting Lapland Witches*

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In 1980 the Metropolitan Museum acquired a curious, macabre painting by the Swiss-born artist Henry Fuseli, depicting the "night-hag" on her flight to the Lapland witches. There has been some confusion concerning the proper title of this work (Figure 1). Fuseli and his contemporaries called it "The Night-hag Visiting Lapland Witches,"[1] "The Night-Hag,"[2] or "Lapland Orgies."[3] Henceforth I shall refer to it simply as *The Night-Hag*.

The painting was put up for auction at Sotheby's of London on July 9, 1980, resurfacing after a long period during which it had been believed lost.[4] It had been consigned to obscurity roughly sixty years earlier when its former owner, Mrs. Boyd of Penkill Castle, Ayrshire, gave the work to her maid, Mrs. Smith, because she "couldn't stand it."[5]

Fuseli's own opinion of the work was apparently quite at variance with that of Mrs. Boyd. When he sold the painting in 1808 to John Knowles, his future biographer, he is said to have remarked: "Young man, the picture you have purchased is one of my very best—yet no one has asked its price till now—it requires a poetic mind to feel and love such a work."[6]

The Night-Hag attained a certain fame during Fuseli's lifetime and for several decades thereafter. Both Allan Cunningham in 1830 and G. Walter Thornbury in 1860 singled it out as one of the most noteworthy paintings of Fuseli's Milton Gallery. Cunningham thought that "in this picture Fuseli may almost be said to have equalled his author,"[7] and Thornbury wrote: "It was no common man that chose such scenes as . . . 'The Lapland Witches' Orgies.'"[8]

The Night-Hag was painted for Fuseli's Milton Gallery, a herculean project illustrating the works and life of the writer John Milton. It included forty-seven paintings, many monumental in scale, to which Fuseli devoted most of his efforts during the decade 1790 to 1800. Forty paintings including *The Night-Hag* were exhibited in 1799, and seven additional paintings were included in the exhibition of the following year. The Milton Gallery was Fuseli's competitive response to the Shakespeare Gallery that the publisher Boydell had financed and organized beginning in 1789. At its conclusion in 1802, the Shakespeare Gallery contained roughly 170 pictures painted by fifty-three artists including Fuseli, whose paintings were certainly among the most successful.[9] Not satisfied with

1. Letter from Fuseli to William Roscoe of Apr. 30, 1794, quoted in Hugh H. Macandrew, "Selected Letters from the Correspondence of Henry Fuseli and William Roscoe of Liverpool," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 6th ser., 62 (1963) p. 212.

2. Allan Cunningham, *The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (London, 1830) II, p. 303.

3. Listed as such in Fuseli's catalogue entry for the painting in the Milton Gallery. See John Knowles, *The Life and Writings of Henry Fuseli, Esq. M.A. R.A.*, 3 vols. (London, 1831) I, p. 208. When the painting was sold at Christie's on April 22, 1842 (sale of the Knowles estate), the catalogue entry listed the work as "The night hag or Lapland orgies."

4. Gert Schiff included this work in the list of lost paintings in his definitive catalogue raisonné of the artist, *Johann Heinrich Füssli, 1741–1825*, 2 vols. (Zurich/Munich, 1973) I, p. 649, no. 35.

5. According to Andrew Festing of Sotheby's, as recorded in the archives of the Department of European Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum.

6. Cunningham, *Lives*, II, pp. 303–304.

7. Ibid., p. 303.

8. G. Walter Thornbury, "Fuseli in Somerset House," *Art Journal* 22 (1860) p. 136.

9. For further information on the Shakespeare Gallery see Winifred Friedman, *Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery* (New York, 1976). For further information on the Milton Gallery see Gert Schiff, *Johann Heinrich Füsslis Milton-Galerie*, Schweizerisches Institut für Kunstwissenschaft 4 (Zurich/Stuttgart, 1963) and Schiff, *Füssli*, I, pp. 159–184, 189–223.

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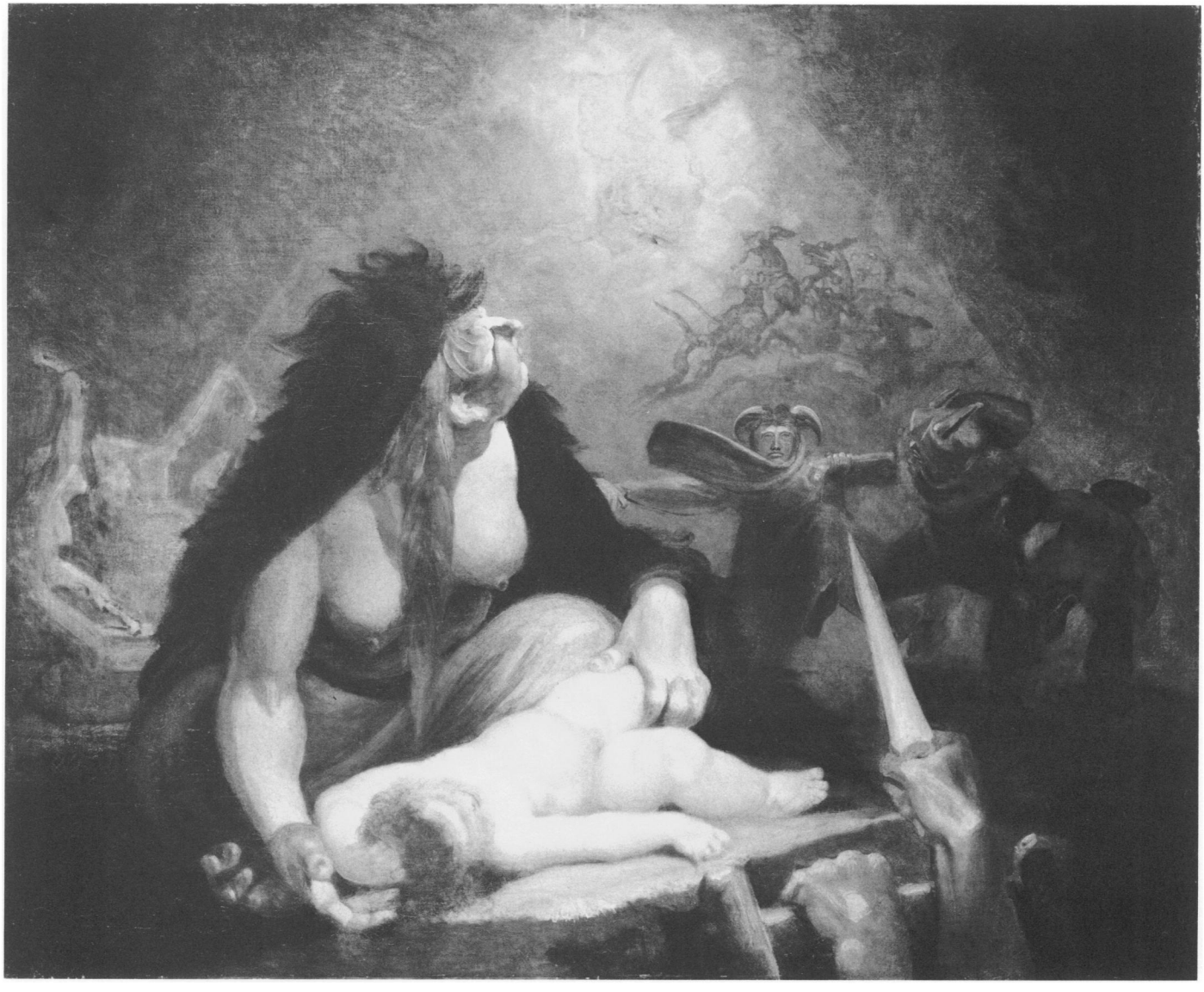


1. Henry Fuseli (1741–1825), *The Night-Hag Visiting Lapland Witches*, 1794–96. Oil on canvas, 40 × 48¾ in. (101.6 × 126.4 cm.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Bequest of Lillian S. Timken, by exchange, Victor Wilbour Memorial Fund, The Alfred N. Punnett Endowment Fund, Marquand and Curtis Funds, 1980.411

this collaborative role, Fuseli aimed to rival the Shakespeare Gallery by single-handedly creating a monument to Milton (and by extension, to himself). In 1790 Fuseli wrote a letter to William Roscoe, the man who became his patron for the Milton Gallery: "I am determined to lay, hatch and crack an egg for myself . . . a series of pictures for Exhibition such as Boydell's."[10]

Most of the paintings in the Milton Gallery illustrate passages from *Paradise Lost*, one of the most popular and revered books in England during the eighteenth century. *The Night-Hag*, number 8 in Fuseli's catalogue of the Milton Gallery, is a depiction of a simile from lines 662–666 of Book II of *Paradise Lost*. Fuseli's catalogue entry for the painting reads:

LAPLAND ORGIES, the Hell-hounds round SIN compared to those that

> ———follow the night-hag, when call'd
> In secret, riding through the air she comes,
> Lur'd with the smell of infant blood, to dance
> With Lapland witches, while the lab'ring moon
> Eclipses at their charms.———
>
> Book II. v. 662.[11]

10. Friedman, *Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery*, p. 209.
11. As recorded in Knowles, *Life and Writings*, I, p. 208.

In Milton's epic, Sin is the guard at the Gates of Hell. The Hell hounds surrounding Sin are compared with the hounds that "follow the night-hag."

The night-hag is the spectral apparition in the upper center of Fuseli's canvas. She is a demon mounted on horseback, raising her left arm to whip on the horse whose head has twisted wildly to the right, neighing, with bulging eyes. The night-hag is painted in golden ocher, surrounded by an aura of bluish-white that quickly fades into the murky greenish-brown tones of the sky, darkening to black in the upper corners. This upper portion of the canvas and the side margins are thinly painted and have unfortunately suffered somewhat from abrasion, so that many of the forms are difficult to discern, particularly the night-hag herself.

Circling the night-hag, below her and to the right, is a pack of nine infernal hounds with their tails erect, their forms outlined in dark green. These are the hounds that Milton has likened to those that surround Sin and kennel in her womb in *Paradise Lost.*

In the foreground, a witch is seated cross-legged on a platform, looking sharply up to the night-hag in the sky and touching a nude male child lying asleep or drugged in front of her, oblivious to the surrounding scene. The warm pink flesh tones of the child contrast sharply with the blue-white skin of the witch, set off against her encircling black fur cloak and the red accents of her bracelets and exposed nipples. The seated and hooded hag is a type that appears frequently in Fuseli's art, beginning with his drawing after a Roman painting, *The Selling of Cupids* of 1775–76.[12] Two other examples among many include *The Changeling* of 1780, depicting witches abducting an infant in exchange for a hideous changeling (Figure 2),[13] and an etching, *The Witch and the Mandrake*, from about 1812 (Figure 3), which illustrates the "Witches' Song" in Ben Jonson's *Masque of Queenes.*[14]

Below and to the right of the sleeping baby are the

12. Schiff, *Füssli*, I, no. 655. See also Robert Rosenblum, *Transformations in Late Eighteenth Century Art* (Princeton, N.J., 1967) pp. 7–8.

13. Schiff, *Füssli*, I, no. 840.

14. Ibid., no. 1497. Another prominent example of a seated and hooded witch occurs in *Percival Delivering Belisane from the Enchantment of Urma* of 1783 in the Tate Gallery, ibid., no. 718. Further examples include ibid., nos. 479, 804, 829, 834, 1510, 1511, 1567, 1752.

2. Fuseli, *The Changeling*, 1780. Pencil and watercolor, 48 × 53.5 cm. Zurich, Kunsthaus (photo: Kunsthaus)

3. Fuseli, *The Witch and the Mandrake*, ca. 1812. Etching on soft ground, 45.7 × 56 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, The Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 53.535.25

hands of another figure climbing a ladder to the platform. One hand grips the top rung, the other raises a dagger that looms very large in the foreground, gleaming with a blue-white radiance. Clearly, this is the scene of an impending infant sacrifice, which has lured the night-hag "with the smell of infant blood."

In the right middle ground, the Lapland witches dance a strange round to the beating of drums, performed by the witches on the extreme left, who glow in infernal, fiery tones. The beating of drums to magic rites was apparently characteristic of the witches and sorcerers of Lapland. Witchcraft, paganism, and sacrificial rites in general were traditionally associated with the Far North, and particularly with Lapland, the last part of Europe to be Christianized. Shakespeare mentions "Lapland sorcerers,"[15] and contemporary travel accounts stress the occult practices of the Laplanders. Jean François Regnard, the French comic dramatist who published an account of his voyage to Lapland in 1681, wrote:

All the world knows, that the people who lived nearest to the north, have always been addicted to idolatry and to magic: the Finlanders, in this respect, surpassed all others; and we may say, that they were as well versed in that diabolical art, as if they had had for their teachers, Zoroaster or Circe. . . . If the Finlanders were so much addicted to magic formerly, their descendants, the Laplanders, are not less so, at the present day.[16]

Regnard and Knud Leems, who traveled to Lapland in 1767, both record that the Laplanders' chief instrument for the performance of magic and sacrificial rites was a drum, which they would heat with fire and then beat wildly with reindeer bones to transport themselves into a state of satanic possession.[17] Regnard vividly described this process:

They take care, first, to bend the skin of the tabor, in taking it near to the fire; then a Laplander, falling on his knees, . . . begins to strike his tabor all round, and redoubling the strokes with the words which he pronounces, as if he were possessed, his countenance becomes blue, his hair stands erect.[18]

Leems presented a similar description of "these ridiculous, and almost furious gestures and ceremonies."[19]

Leems also recorded the Lapland witches' habit of dancing to drums at their nocturnal gatherings.[20] The notion of witches dancing by night is common in English literature as well: in Dryden we read,

Thus, to some desart plain, or old wood side,
Dire night-hags come from far to dance their round:
And o'r brode Rivers on their fiends they ride,
Or sweep in clowds above the blasted ground.[21]

A scene from Ben Jonson's *Masque of Queenes* gives a more explicit description of the witches' dance:

At w^{ch}, wth a strange and sodayne musique, they fell into a magicall Daunce full of preposterous change, and gesticulation, but most applying to theyr property: who, at theyr meetings, do all thinges contrary to the custome of men, dancing back to back, hip to hip, theyr handes joyn'd, and making theyr circles backward, to the left hand, with strange phantastique motions of they^{r} heads and bodyes.[22]

Fuseli may well have had this passage in mind while painting *The Night-Hag*. The witches on the right dance with their backs to the middle and move in a circle to their left with hands joined, making motions that are indeed strange and fantastic.

Two of these dancing witches have an attribute that

15. *Comedy of Errors*, IV, iii, l. 11.

16. Translated in John Pinkerton, ed., *A General Collection of the Best and Most Interesting Voyages and Travels in All Parts of the World* (London, 1808) I, p. 178. Fuseli could have read Regnard's *Voyage de Laponie* in the original French. It was published in numerous editions throughout the 18th century.

17. Ibid., pp. 179–181, 473–478. The Leems account, also translated in Pinkerton, was originally published in Latin, which Fuseli could have read.

18. Ibid., p. 181.

19. Ibid., p. 478.

20. Ibid., p. 473. The beating of drums by Fuseli's witches may also have to do with the moon's eclipse in ll. 665–666 of his Milton text. James Paterson, in his *Complete Commentary with Etymological, Explanatory, Critical and Classical Notes on Milton's Paradise Lost* (London, 1744) p. 227, says in reference to the "labouring moon" that "At this Time the *Heathens* beat Drums and Timbrels to relieve it."

21. John Dryden, "Annus Mirabilis," in *Works* (Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1956) I, p. 96, stanza 248.

22. Ben Jonson, *Masque of Queenes* (London: The King's Printers, 1930) p. 30. Fuseli certainly knew the *Masque of Queenes*, since he illustrated a passage from it in Figure 3 above. A dance in which everything was reversed was a common feature of the Devil's or Witches' Sabbath. See Ernest Jones, *On the Nightmare* (London, 1931) p. 185.

is neither mentioned by Milton or Ben Jonson nor related to Lapland sorcery. The two witches in the middle ground immediately to the right of the sacrificial scene bear wings on their heads, which is an attribute of Medusa.[23] According to ancient mythology, a glimpse of Medusa's head would turn the viewer into stone. Originally represented in demonic and grotesque form, Medusa was transformed by artists of the Classical and Hellenistic periods into a woman of cold and stony beauty with wings in her hair and a necklace of snakes.[24]

Fuseli seems to have used the most famous of these antique Gorgon heads, the Rondanini Medusa (Figure 4), as a model for the features of the dancing witch whose winged head faces us in a stony stare. Fuseli could have seen this work, then in the Palazzo Rondanini in Rome, during his Italian sojourn, which lasted from 1770 to 1778. A decade after Fuseli left Italy, Goethe was profoundly impressed by this Medusa during his Italian journey in 1788, and he described it as "a wondrous work, which expresses the discord between death and life, between pain and pleasure."[25] In Fuseli's *Night-Hag*, the Medusa's head becomes a symbol of death and the demonic in classical form, grafted onto the body of an outlandish Lapland witch.

The Night-Hag is painted with the lurid, diabolical garishness characteristic of Fuseli's illustrations of *Paradise Lost* for the Milton Gallery. Thornbury in 1860 singled out *The Night-Hag* together with *The Lazar House* from the Milton Gallery as sublime examples of Fuseli's "German genius for *diablerie*,"[26] a description not inappropriate for the painting now in the Metropolitan Museum.

Fuseli first mentioned this work in a letter written to William Roscoe on April 30, 1794, under a list of "pictures painted."[27] In another letter to Roscoe, on August 9, 1796, Fuseli included the work again in a list of the paintings as "The Similes of the Nighthag visiting the Lapland witches," and further identified it as a large half-length.[28] The standard half-length in England was generally about 50 by 40 inches, which is indeed the size of the painting in the Metropolitan Museum, although in horizontal rather than vertical format.

The inclusion of *The Night-Hag* in the list of "pictures painted" of 1794 seems to imply that it had been finished by April of that year. However, this is not necessarily true, since it was Fuseli's practice in those years to work simultaneously on a number of canvases at various stages of completion. In a letter to Roscoe on April 4, 1795, Fuseli wrote: "Of Milton I have now sixteen pictures partly finished, partly in that state of forwardness, that, if by the assistance of my *friends* . . . I am enabled to devote the greater part of this year to them, I may look forward to an exhibition by February or March next."[29]

The Night-Hag was probably among this group of sixteen pictures and we cannot tell if it was one of

4. The Rondanini Medusa, marble copy of Greek bronze original of the 5th century B.C. Munich, Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek (photo: Hartwig Koppermann)

23. I owe this observation to Gert Schiff.

24. Wilhelm Heinrich Roscher, *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* (Leipzig, 1884–90) I, pp. 1698, 1721–1724.

25. "Der Medusa Rondanini; ein wundersames Werk, das, den Zwiespalt zwischen Tod und Leben, zwischen Schmerz und Wollust ausdrückend, einen unnennbaren Reiz wie irgendein anderes Problem über uns ausübt." Goethe, *Italienische Reise*, ed. Herbert von Einem (Munich, 1978) p. 546.

26. Thornbury, "Fuseli in Somerset House," p. 135.

27. Macandrew, "Selected Letters," p. 212.

28. Ibid., pp. 214–215.

29. Ibid., p. 213.

those completed or of those in a state of "forwardness." Similarly, after the list of pictures of August 1796, Fuseli appended: "to these, many finished, all, even the Largest, so far advanced, as to require no more than a fortnight's work each, some not above a day or two."[30] Thus, it is possible that the work was not completed until after August 1796. However, we can be sure that it had been conceived by 1794 and was completed or largely carried out by 1796. This date places the work in close connection with other depictions of witches and nocturnal demons painted by Fuseli in the first half of the 1790s, including the Frankfurt *Nightmare* of 1790–91 and *The Nightmare Leaving the Chamber of Two Women* of about 1793 (Figure 6).[31]

Fuseli's choice of text for the eighth painting in his Milton Gallery, *The Night-Hag*, is rather surprising. The passage does not describe a significant or dramatic event in the narrative but is an elaborate simile, and it was one of Fuseli's interesting innovations in the Milton Gallery to give a prominent place to Milton's similes and metaphors; his other depictions of metaphors from *Paradise Lost* include *The Shepherd's Dream* of 1793, and *A Griffon Pursuing an Arimaspian* and *Odysseus Between Scylla and Charybdis*, both of 1794–96.[32]

In Richard Bentley's edition of *Paradise Lost* of 1732 (Alexander Pope called him "Slashing Bentley" because of his vociferous criticisms of the masterpiece),[33] lines 662–666 of Book II are annotated as follows: "But much rather let him take back his fabulous Night-Hag, his Dance of the Lapland Witches and his Smell of Infant Blood; and not contaminate this most majestic Poem with Trash, nor convey such idle but dangerous Stories to his young and credulous Female Readers."[34] Of course, this kind of criticism would merely serve to make the passage more enticing to Fuseli, who relished the scandalous and the horrific.

Bentley did not explain what Milton might have meant by his "fabulous Night-Hag." Most modern commentators on Milton agree in interpreting the night-hag as a reference to the classical goddess Hecate, who appears in *Macbeth* as the queen of the witches.[35] Hecate was heir to a rich and eclectic tradition, variously associated with the moon, the underworld, sacrificial rites, madness, nightmares, and witchcraft. A pack of howling Stygian dogs was often said to accompany her nocturnal flights, particularly in her later connection with sorcery.[36]

However, it does not appear to be the goddess Hecate that we see flying toward the Lapland witches in Fuseli's painting. Hecate was usually depicted with three heads and bodies, as in Blake's *Triple Hecate* of 1794. Instead, we are faced with an ethereal demon mounted on a wildly twisting horse. The image is barely recognizable, shrouded in an aura of eerie light. The identification with Hecate seems to lead onto a false trail.

Another approach to the night-hag that better accords with the image in Fuseli's painting is the definition of the word given in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: "A hag or female demon supposed to ride the air by night; the nightmare."

This connection between the night-hag and the nightmare is, in fact, mentioned in one commentary on *Paradise Lost* that Fuseli may have known. In 1744 James Paterson wrote:

> *Night-Hag* . . . i.e. A *Night Witch*: The *Latins* called it *Incubus* and *Succubus*; i.e. *Lying under* and *over*; We, the *Night-Mare*; . . . The Antients thought it was a *Devil*, or *Witch*, that haunted People in Bed in the Night; but now it's found to be only an heavy Weight, rising from their depraved Imaginations. Horses are more subject to it than any Creatures else.[37]

This commentary has some relevance also to Fuseli's more famous *Nightmare* of 1781 (Figure 5), which depicts an incubus weighing down upon the abdomen of a dreaming woman while the head of a horse peers through the curtains. The incubus, a devil, is the male form of the nightmare; the succubus, a witch or hag, is his female counterpart. The nightmare was

30. Ibid., p. 215.

31. Schiff, *Füssli*, I, nos. 928, 929.

32. Ibid., nos. 1762, 894; lost works, no. 37. See p. 197.

33. Raymond Dexter Havens, *The Influence of Milton on English Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass., 1922) p. 29.

34. Richard Bentley, ed., *Paradise Lost* (London, 1732) p. 61.

35. See A. W. Verity, ed., *Paradise Lost, Books I & II* (Cambridge, 1924) p. 125. See also F. T. Prince, ed., *Paradise Lost, Books I & II* (London, 1962). Isaac Asimov appears to be the only modern annotator to mention the nightmare as another possible meaning for Milton's "night-hag," in *Asimov's Annotated Paradise Lost* (New York, 1974) p. 92.

36. Roscher, *Ausführliches Lexikon*, I, pp. 1885–1910.

37. Paterson, *Complete Commentary*, pp. 226–227.

5. Fuseli, *The Nightmare*, 1781. Oil on canvas, 101 × 127 cm. The Detroit Institute of Arts (photo: Detroit Institute of Arts)

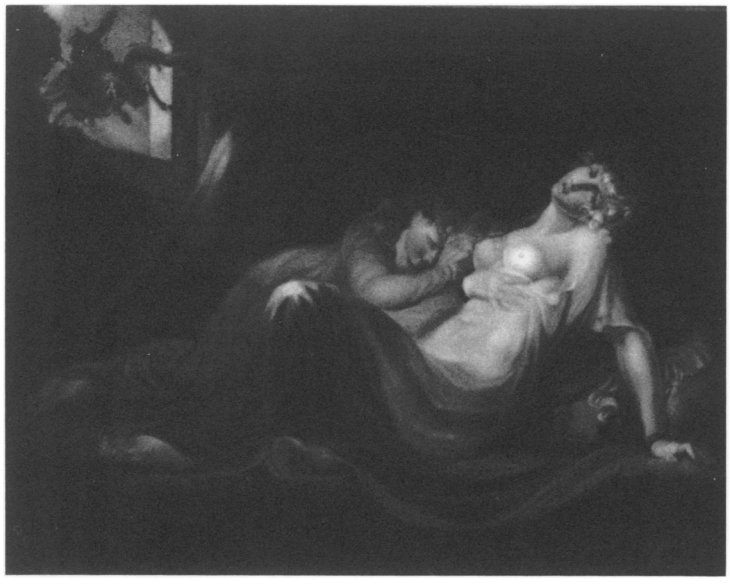
generally conceived as being of the opposite sex to the dreamer. In his essay on Fuseli's *Nightmare*, H. W. Janson discussed the folklore of the succubus:

> In England, the nightmare, i.e. the night demon that sits on the sleeper's chest and thus causes the feeling of suffocation characteristic of the pathology of nightmares, was often thought of as female, a *night-hag* [emphasis mine] or night-witch. . . . In either case, the incubus would "ride" his victim, or at times even assume the shape of a horse.[38]

Although there is apparently no direct etymological link between the nightmare and the mare, nightmares are intimately connected with horses and the metaphor of "riding" in folk legend, probably because of the well-known sexual symbolism of the horse.[39] Another reason for this association may have been the tendency for horses themselves to be afflicted with nightly disturbances, as James Paterson mentioned in his *Commentary*, and as is testified to by earlier writers. John Aubrey, a seventeenth-century antiquary best known for his *Miscellanies* (1696), a collection of anecdotes on the supernatural, gave a

38. H. W. Janson, "Fuseli's Nightmare," *Arts and Sciences* 2 (Spring 1963) p. 26.

39. See Jones, *On the Nightmare*, pp. 243–339; Nicolas Powell, *Fuseli: The Nightmare* (New York, 1972) pp. 50, 56ff.; and John Moffit's review of Powell in *Burlington Magazine* 118 (July 1976) p. 537.



6. Fuseli, *The Nightmare Leaving the Chamber of Two Women*, ca. 1793. Oil on canvas, 100 × 124 cm. Zurich, Muraltengut (photo: Tresch + Wenger)

7. Fuseli, *The Nightmare Leaving the Chamber of Two Women*, 1810. Pencil and watercolor, 31.5 × 40.8 cm. Zurich, Kunsthaus (photo: Kunsthaus)

charm against the nightmare, "to prevent the Night Mare, viz. the Hag, from riding their Horses, who will sometimes sweat all Night."[40] The seventeenth-century poet Robert Herrick suggested another remedy:

> Hang up Hooks, and Sheers to scare
> Hence the Hag, that rides the Mare.[41]

The nightmare, the "hag," and horses are connected in a more famous source: Mercutio's speech on Queen Mab in *Romeo and Juliet*:

> And in this state she gallops night by night
> Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love;
> . . . . . .
> . . . This is that very Mab
> That plats the manes of horses in the night,
> And bakes the elf-locks in foul sluttish hairs,
> Which once untangled much misfortune bodes:
> This is the hag, when maids lie on their backs,
> That presses them and learns them first to bear,
> Making them women of good carriage:
> This is she . . . .
>
> I, iv, ll. 70–95

Shakespeare, Aubrey, and Herrick all called the nightmare a hag, a commonly used synonym for the night-hag. Katherine Mary Briggs describes the hag or "hagge" as "one sixteenth century name for a Night-Mare, conceived of as a hideous succubus who sat on a man in his sleep, squeezing his stomach and causing horrible dreams,"[42] like Fuseli's *Nightmare* with the sexes reversed.

As late as 1834 the night-hag was still employed in a sense related to this earlier usage. In Lietch Ritchie's *Wanderings by the Seine*, there is a passage that recalls Fuseli's *Nightmare*: "and they look around, quaking, in search of relief from the indefinite dread, which sits like the night-hag on their souls."[43] As belief in witches dwindled, the term "night-hag" could be used only metaphorically—something vague and indefinitely horrific—before dropping out of speech altogether.

Fuseli's *Night-Hag* could be described as belonging to a middle phase in this development. He does not choose to depict the night-hag with a naturalism that could convince us of her actual physical and material presence. She is rather an immaterial phantom, like a vision seen in a dream. But nevertheless, Fuseli's

40. Quoted in Katharine Mary Briggs, *Pale Hecate's Team: An Examination of the Beliefs on Witchcraft and Magic among Shakespeare's Contemporaries and His Immediate Successors* (London, 1962) pp. 177–178.

41. "Another Charme for Stables," originally published in *Hesperides*, 1648. Quoted in Briggs, *Pale Hecate's Team*, p. 178.

42. Katharine Mary Briggs, *Encyclopedia of Fairies: Hobgoblins, Brownies, Bogies and Other Supernatural Creatures* (New York, 1976) p. 216.

43. Lietch Ritchie, *Wanderings by the Seine* (London, 1834) p. 59, a travel account with twenty engravings after drawings by J. M. W. Turner.

depiction closely follows sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English folk beliefs.

Briggs describes the primitive form of the nightmare as "a mounted supernatural hag, scouring the countryside with nine demons as her offspring, a kind of female Wild Hunt,"[44] a description that corresponds closely to Fuseli's painting. In Milton's text, a parallel is established between the nine demons that follow the night-hag or nightmare and the Hell hounds that surround Sin in *Paradise Lost* and live in her womb.

Shakespeare, in *King Lear*, also mentioned the nine offspring or familiars of the nightmare. Edgar, playing a madman, wards off the "foul fiend" with a charm:

> Swithold footed thrice the old;
> He met the night-mare, and her nine-fold;
> Bid her alight,
> And her troth plight,
> And aroint thee, witch, aroint thee!
> III, iv, ll. 125–129

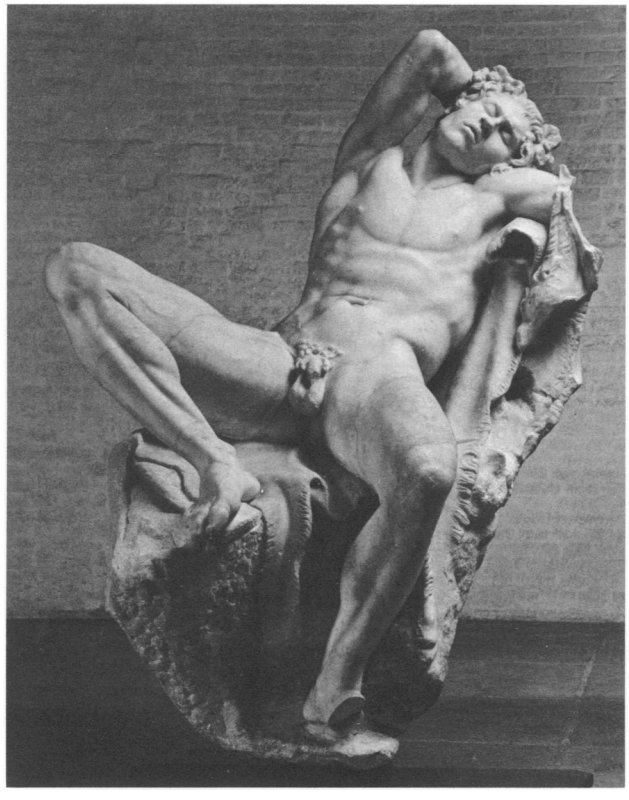
Coincidentally, in the same year that Fuseli began his *Night-Hag*, Samuel Coleridge commented on this passage from *King Lear* in a letter to Southey on December 11, 1794: "Would not this be a fine subject for a *wild* ode. . . . I shall set about one, when I am in a Humour to *abandon* myself to all the Diableries, that ever meet the Eye of a Fuseli!"[45]

The identification of Fuseli's night-hag with the nightmare is further strengthened by the close resemblance of Fuseli's apparition to his earlier depictions of the nightmare, particularly *The Nightmare Leaving the Chamber of Two Women* of about 1793 (Figure 6). A drawing of 1810 based on this painting provides a clearer image of the departing night-fiend (Figure 7). In both works, the "nightmare" is flying

44. Briggs, *Pale Hecate's Team*, p. 177.

45. E. L. Griggs, ed., *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Oxford, 1956) I, p. 135. Alexander Runciman did a drawing on this passage in *King Lear* in ca. 1772–78; see Nancy L. Pressly, *The Fuseli Circle in Rome: Early Romantic Art of the 1770's*, exh. cat. (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 1979) p. 16.

8. Fuseli, *Titania's Awakening*, 1785–89. Oil on canvas, 222 × 280 cm. Winterthur, Kunstmuseum (photo: Schweiz. Institut für Kunstwissenschaft, Zurich)



9. The Barberini Faun, Greek, ca. 220 B.C. Marble. Munich, Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek (photo: Hartwig Koppermann)

out of the window of a bedchamber after having already plagued one of the sleepers. The nightmare is depicted as an incubus mounted on a horse, his right arm raised to whip on his steed. The only major difference between this apparition and the night-hag in the painting in the Metropolitan Museum is that the nightmare leaving the bedchamber of two women is seen from the rear, after the fact, departing instead of arriving. The identity of the image (except for its sex) in both cases is surely the same. Furthermore, the head of the horse that the night-hag rides through the sky is patterned after the horse's head peering mysteriously through the curtains in the *Nightmare* of 1781 (Figure 5). Both animals have the same wild and hypnotic appearance with stony and demonic eyes.

An even closer parallel can be seen in the large work *Titania's Awakening*, painted in 1785–89 for Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery (Figure 8).[46] The sleeping Bottom in the right half of the canvas is surrounded by witches and evil spirits, among whom is the nightmare: an incubus mounted on horseback who gallops over Bottom's forehead, raising back his left arm to whip on his wild steed, just as in *The Night-Hag* in the following decade.

While in Fuseli's earlier paintings of the nightmare there is no doubt as to who the dreamer is, the situation in *The Night-Hag* is more complicated. However, a sleeper can be identified: the sacrificial victim, the baby boy lying on his back in the foreground. Ironically, the rosy-cheeked child sleeps with innocent, untroubled ease, like a drowsy Cupid in the midst of Lapland witches and a host of demons. With his left arm raised over his head, his other arm hanging limply at his side, the child has been rendered in the pose traditional in Western art for the depiction of sleep and dreaming, often with sexual or erotic overtones. Antique statues of sleepers like the Barberini Faun in the Munich Glyptothek (Figure 9) or the Ariadne in the Vatican Museum are generally depicted in poses similar to that of Fuseli's child, with one arm bent back over their heads. A great many Renaissance and Baroque paintings use the same classical formula to indicate sleep, often with the connotation of sexual vulnerability. The child in Fuseli's *Night-Hag* and the woman in his *Nightmare* both descend from this tradition, the male child deriving from the drowsy abandon of the Barberini Faun, the female dreamer from the Vatican Ariadne.[47]

In Fuseli's *Nightmare*, the bad dream that disturbs the sleeping woman has an obvious sexual component. As Nicolas Powell has written, "there can be little doubt that the girl in Fuseli's painting is experiencing an imaginary sexual assault."[48] According to folk legend, the nightmare was believed to be just that, a devil or witch, an incubus or succubus, that sexually visited the dreamer in bed. In more modern terms, the psy-

46. Schiff, *Füssli*, I, no. 754.

47. Powell, *Fuseli: The Nightmare*, p. 70. It is interesting to note that the Barberini Faun was originally installed in the Palazzo Barberini lying on its back, and it was reproduced in this way in an engraving published in several books of the 17th and 18th centuries, as in Hieronymus Tetius, *Aedes Barberinae ad Quirinalem* (Rome, 1642) p. 215. See A. Furtwängler, *Beschreibung der Glyptothek König Ludwigs I. zu München* (Munich, 1900) pp. 199–206. The engraving depicted the sculpture (reversed) from an angle very similar to that of Fuseli's child in *The Night-Hag*.

48. Powell, *Fuseli: The Nightmare*, p. 60.

10. Fuseli, *Four Courtesans, Two Stitching on Boys' Bodies*, ca. 1815–20. Pencil and ink, 23 × 18.8 cm. Zurich, Kunsthaus (photo: Kunsthaus)

choanalyst Ernest Jones has stated: "All the beliefs about the Nightmare, in whatever guise, proceed from the idea of a sexual assault which is both wished for and dreaded."[49]

The sexual component of *The Night-Hag* is both more obscure and more perverse than in *The Nightmare*, but equally present. The sacrificial knife raised so threateningly in the foreground of the painting carries connotations of castration as well as death, and the seated witch could be construed as gently pulling apart the baby's legs with her hand to facilitate an impending gruesome deed. In addition, the braided hair of the seated witch hangs between her breasts in a phallic and fetishistic form, reversing the shape of the upraised knife.

The subject of women castrating a young child seems to have fascinated Fuseli. This theme appears in several late drawings (1815–20) depicting one or more courtesans—often with long, phallic needles—sadistically sewing up the genitals of a faintly sketched boy or boys (Figure 10). In a drawing of about 1800–10 (Figure 11), a woman with an exotic hairstyle holds a child by the leg while daintily cutting the body up from the crotch with a large knife.[50] While Fuseli's *Night-Hag* is not nearly so explicit—it was intended, after all, for public exhibition—the same sexual threat is intimated.

The connection between the nightmare and fears of death and castration has been well documented by modern psychoanalytic theory. According to Ernest Jones: "The original fear [concerning the nightmare and the Wild Hunt] . . . must have been that of being

49. Jones, *On the Nightmare*, p. 319.

50. Schiff, *Füssli*, I, nos. 1626, 1624. Other examples include nos. 1603 and 1625, the latter illustrated in *Burlington Magazine* 117 (Feb. 1975) p. 122, fig. 84. See Schiff, *Füssli*, I, p. 228, and Gert Schiff, "Fuseli, Lucifer and the Medusa," in *Henry Fuseli*, exh. cat. (London: Tate Gallery, 1975) pp. 15–19.

11. Fuseli, *Woman Cutting up the Body of a Child*, ca. 1800–10. Pencil and ink, 26 × 20.6 cm. Zurich, Kunsthaus (photo: Kunsthaus)

killed, *i.e.* castrated, by the dreaded nightly visitor."[51] Fuseli's *Night-Hag*, like his *Nightmare*, displays a pre-Freudian awareness of the role played by sexuality in the phenomenon of the nightmare and related beliefs in night-hags and witchcraft.

Fuseli was obsessed in his art by the theme of dominant women (either as witches or, more commonly, as seductive courtesans) sexually abusing men or young boys. One of Fuseli's primary symbols for this image of the *femme fatale* was the head of Medusa, endowed with wings, whose cold but beautiful face turns men to stone.[52] Thus, it is unexpected but psychologically not inappropriate that, in *The Night-Hag*, the Medusa shows her face amid the Lapland witches.

The modern viewer may be surprised by the extent to which Fuseli's canvas, which at first sight appears so outlandish, was firmly grounded on cultural knowledge, replete with classical allusions, and based on research and close attention to various literary texts. Werner Hofmann has characterized Fuseli's works as "collages of quotations,"[53] a description perfectly appropriate to *The Night-Hag*, both on the visual and verbal levels. In general, what appears romantic, wild, and modern in Fuseli's art is almost always based on earlier literature, supported by his interpretation of academic theory in the wake of Reynolds, and on the art of his idols: the "Ancients" and Michelangelo, Shakespeare and Milton.

The genius of *Paradise Lost* was almost invariably associated with the sublime, a central category in eighteenth-century aesthetics and taste. It denoted grandeur and magnificence, the wild and overwhelming, and was opposed to the domesticity and decorum of the beautiful. Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, published in 1757, differentiated the sublime and the beautiful on the analogy of pain versus pleasure. The sublime is that which incites "delightful horror," fear, and astonishment, terror being "in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently the ruling principle of the sublime."[54] Not all the theorizers on the sublime valued the "terrific" component quite so highly, but terrifying, horrific, satanic, and supernatural subjects were extremely fashionable in late eighteenth-century England, in both literature and art. This helps us to understand the special popularity enjoyed by *Paradise Lost*, *Macbeth*, and Ossian.[55]

The chief means of achieving terror (aside from subject matter) in Burke's view was "obscurity." "Every one will be sensible of this," he wrote, "who considers how greatly night adds to our dread, in all cases of danger, and how much the notions of ghosts and goblins, of which none can form clear ideas, affect minds."[56] "And even in painting," Burke admitted, "a judicious obscurity in some things contributes to the effect of the picture; because . . . in nature dark, confused, uncertain images have a greater power on the fancy."[57] Milton, predictably, is Burke's finest example for the terrible sublimity of obscurity, and the personification of Death in Book II of *Paradise Lost* is singled out as a passage in which "all is dark, uncertain, confused, terrible, and sublime to the last degree."[58]

It is not insignificant that Fuseli chooses to illustrate the passage immediately preceding the famous description of Death for his painting of *The Night-Hag*, which follows directly from Burke's precepts on the sublime. Terror is exploited in the depiction of the infant sacrifice, and obscurity is evoked to clothe the witches and the night-hag. Here all is indeed "dark, uncertain, confused, [and] terrible . . . to the last degree."

Fuseli's own writings on art corroborate and elaborate on Burke. As was usual, he accorded the highest place in the hierarchy of artistic categories to "sublime" history painting, whose aim is to astonish and to convey forcibly a general idea or "sentiment," preferably related to terror and passion.[59] *The Night-*

51. Jones, *On the Nightmare*, p. 265. See also p. 255. It is interesting to note that Jones bases his psychoanalytic interpretation of the nightmare on the same European folk legends concerning incubi, night-hags, and witchcraft that had provided such fertile subject matter for Fuseli.

52. See Schiff, *Füssli*, I, pp. 233, 319, 345. Other drawings depicting the Medusa are ibid., nos. 1442, 1443, and 1118, a portrait of 1799 of his wife, *Mrs. Fuseli Seated in Front of the Fire, Behind Her a Relief Medallion with Her Portrait as the Medusa.*

53. Werner Hofmann, "A Captive," in *Henry Fuseli*, p. 35.

54. Edmund Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry . . .*, ed. James T. Boulton (London, 1958) p. 58.

55. For the "Neoclassic Horrific" see Rosenblum, *Transformations*, pp. 11ff. For the Ossian craze see *Ossian und die Kunst um 1800*, exh. cat. (Munich/Hamburg: Hamburger Kunsthalle, 1974).

56. Burke, *Philosophical Enquiry*, pp. 58–59.

57. Ibid., p. 62.

58. Ibid., p. 59.

59. Knowles, *Life and Writings*, II, p. 157. See also Eudo Mason, *The Mind of Henry Fuseli* (London, 1951) pp. 208–209, 216.

Hag could serve as an example, although perhaps it is too fantastic for even Fuseli to have considered it to be a work in the sublime mode.

Fuseli's stress on generality in the sublime, inherited from Reynolds and a common feature of academic art theory, should not be taken lightly. The use of judicious obscurity and the generalizing avoidance of detail separated, in Fuseli's view, the grandiose or sublime from the grotesque. "All apparatus destroys terror, as all ornament grandeur," Fuseli wrote. "The minute catalogue of the cauldron's ingredients in *Macbeth* destroys the terror attendant on mysterious darkness."[60] Or again:

> It is not by the accumulation of infernal or magic machinery, distinctly seen, by the introduction of Hecate and a chorus of female demons . . . that Macbeth can be made an object of terror,—to render him so you must . . . surround the horrid vision with darkness, exclude its limits, and shear its light to glimpses.[61]

This is exactly the strategy employed in *The Night-Hag*.

Fuseli even derided Salvator Rosa for giving too great emphasis to vulgar, grotesque details at the expense of generality: "His magic visions, less founded on principles of terror than on mythologic trash and caprice, are to the probable combinations of nature, what the paroxysms of a fever are to the flights of vigorous fancy."[62] The phrase, "principles of terror," is characteristic and revealing, and serves as a reminder that Fuseli was still a product of the Enlightenment. Even terror and the diabolical were to be handled in a rational, reasoned, and learned manner.

A passage from Fuseli's lecture on "Invention" given at the Royal Academy in 1801 illuminates this reasoned and generalizing attitude toward the mythological and supernatural. He is speaking of the sensible limits on unbridled invention imposed by ancient writers like Horace:

> Guarded by these [limits], their [ancient] mythology scattered its metamorphoses, made every element its tributary, and transmitted the privilege to us, on equal conditions: their Scylla and the Portress of Hell [Milton's Sin is meant], their daemons and our spectres, the shade of Patroclus and the ghost of Hamlet, their naiads, nymphs, and oreads, and our sylphs, gnomes, and fairies, their furies and our witches, differ less in essence, than in local, temporary, social modifications: their common origin was fancy, operating on the materials of nature, assisted by legendary tradition and the curiosity implanted in us of diving into the invisible.[63]

Fuseli's mythological subject matter "scattered its metamorphoses" as well, frequently mixing together classical motifs with English fairy superstitions and allusions to Shakespeare and Milton. *The Night-Hag* merges Milton, the nightmare and the Medusa, Lapland, and Ben Jonson in a single cauldron.

Fuseli was obsessed by supernatural, diabolical beings, dreams, visions, and the flights of vigorous fancy. However little he personally believed in the supernatural aspects of his favorite subject matter, it was the principle of the visionary and the nightmarish that interested him, as a symbol for the sublime but haunted imagination.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am greatly indebted to the very generous advice and guidance of Professor Gert Schiff of the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, and Professor Allen Staley of Columbia University.

60. Knowles, *Life and Writings*, III, p. 81.
61. Mason, *The Mind of Henry Fuseli*, p. 218.
62. Knowles, *Life and Writings*, II, p. 102.
63. Ibid., p. 140.