



*from*  
*On 'On Dreams'*



*Maureen Thorson*



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*“If a woman chances during her menstrual period to look into a highly polished mirror, the surface of it will grow cloudy with a blood-coloured haze.”*

*—Aristotle, On Dreams*





In dreams, cause and effect are tangled. Narrative is effaced. A mirror turns red because a woman looks at it.

People have long thought that dreams are prophetic.  
Mostly because they show us our fears.



**It is best to confront one's fears directly – as in a mirror.**

**“A candy-colored clown they call the Sandman**

**tiptoes to my room every night.”**

How much of life is spent recounting the facts?

How much of life is spent recounting what we *think* are the facts?

In the *Defense of Poesy*, Spenser argues that poetry's primary virtue is that it holds a mirror up to life.

At the time that Aristotle wrote his treatise *On Dreams*, the mirrors available in Greece were mainly of polished copper.

This might account for Aristotle's idea that a mirror could turn red. But it is more likely that Aristotle thought of a mirror as a sort of eye, a sense organ. Just as looking at a red object will, as Aristotle himself notes elsewhere, create a green afterimage "in" my eye, so the mirror, by "looking" at a menstruating woman, takes on a red tinge.

Of course, Aristotle also wrote that men have more teeth than women. Without bothering to look in any mouths.

In a mirror, everything is transposed, left, right; right, left.  
You see yourself, but not as others see you.



The defense of poesy – that it holds a mirror up to life.  
Left, right. Right, left.

The statements I've made – how can anyone know they are true? Not that I mean to lie but, like Aristotle, I may have my blind spots, my misconceptions.

My vanities.

**Narcissus nodding into his own reflection.**

For example, it has been my dream to *seem* authoritative,  
like Aristotle, if nothing else.

**After all, who wouldn't want to appear objective? Wouldn't at least pretend to it?**

**Answer: persons with a better relationship to reality than myself.**

The poet Doug Lang has made a series of reminisces, each concluding with the sentence, “I knew it was a dream because . . . everything is.”

*Row, row, row your boat...*



**My relationship to truth may be dreamlike at best.**

**I must admit to subtle differences in the same memory,  
recalled now, recalled again.**

In an essay on movies in which women or, more often, young girls, become possessed, Danielle Pafunda quotes the ancient Greek physician Aretaeus of Cappadocia: “In women, in the hollow of the body below the ribcage, lies the womb. It is very much like an independent animal within the body, for it moves around of its own accord and is quite erratic.”

And if I said, there is some truth to that?

Would a mirror flush at the sight of me?

Dickinson's admonition that we "tell all the truth, but tell it slant" presupposes that we know what it is. But if we only intuit it, "as in a glass, darkly"?

**“Humankind cannot bear very much reality,” writes T.S. Eliot.**

**Hence poesy?**

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Left, right.

Right, left.





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