

***Confessio Amantis***  
John Gower (ca. 1390)  
Bk. 4: "Ceix and Alceone"

2917 Mi sone and for thou tellest so  
A man may finde of time ago  
That many a sweuene hath be certein  
2920 Al be it so that some men sein  
That sweuenes ben of no credence  
Bot forto shewe in evidence  
That thei fulofte sothe thinges  
Betokne I thenke in my wrytinges  
2925 To telle a tale thervpon  
Which fell be olde daies gon  
THIS finde I write in Poesie  
Ceix the king of Trocinie  
Hadde Alceone to his wif  
2930 Which as hire oghne hertes lif  
Him loueth and he hadde also  
A brother which was cleped tho  
Dedalion and he per cas  
ffro kinde of man forshape was  
2935 Into a goshauk of liknesse  
Wherof the king gret heuynesse  
Hath take and thoghte in his corage  
To gon upon a pelrinage  
Into a straunge regioun  
2940 Wher he hath his devocioun  
To don his sacrifice and preie  
If that he mihte in eny weie  
Toward the goddes find grace  
His brother hele to purchace  
2945 So that he mihte be reformed  
Of that he hadde be transformed

My son, since you bring it up,  
A man may find, of times gone by,  
That many a dream has been true,  
Although it is true that some men say,  
That dreams are of no significance.  
But, in order to provide the evidence,  
That they very often true things  
Betoken, I intend in my writings  
To tell a tale about it,  
Which happened in days gone by.  
THIS I find written in Poetry:  
Ceix, the king of Trocinie,  
Had Alceone as his wife,  
Who, as her own heart's life,  
Loves him. And he had also  
A brother, who was called then  
Dedalion, and he, by chance,  
From the nature of a man was reshaped  
Into the likeness of a goshawk.  
From which the king a great weight  
Bears, and thought in his heart  
To go on a pilgrimage  
Into a strange land,  
Where he wishes  
To perform his sacrifice and to pray  
If he might, in any way,  
Through the gods' grace  
Purchase his brother's health,  
So that he might be returned  
To that from which he had been transformed.

To this pourpos and to this ende  
This king is redy forto wende  
As he which wolde go be shipe  
2950 And forto don him felashipe  
His wif vnto the see him broghte  
With al hire herte and him besoghte  
That he the time hire wolde sein  
Whan that he thoghte come ayein  
2955 Withinne he seith tuo monthe day  
And thus in al the haste he may  
He tok his leue and forth he seileth  
Wepende and she hirsself beweileth  
And torneth hom ther she cam fro  
2960 Bot whan the monthes were ago  
The whiche he sette of his comynge  
And that she herde no tydinge  
Ther was no care forto seche  
Wherof the goddes to beseche  
2965 Tho she began in many wise  
And to Iuno hire sacrificise  
Aboue alle othre most she dede  
And for hir lord she hath so bede  
To wite and knowe hou that he ferde  
2970 That Iuno the goddesse hire herde  
Anon and upon this matiere  
She bad Yris her messagere  
To slepes hous that she shal wende  
And bidde him that he make an ende  
2975 Be sweuene and shewen al the cas  
Unto this ladi hou it was

To this purpose, and to this end,  
This king is ready to go,  
As one who would go by ship.  
And, to keep him company,  
His wife brought him down to the sea,  
And with all her heart beseeched him,  
To tell her the time  
When he thought he would return.  
“Within,” he said, “two months and a day.”  
And thus, with all the haste he could muster,  
He took his leave, and forth he sails,  
Weeping, and she, herself, wails,  
And turns toward home, where she came from.  
But when the months had passed,  
Which he had set for his return,  
And she had heard no tidings,  
There was nothing else to do:  
And so, to beseech the gods  
Then she began in many ways,  
And to Juno her sacrifice  
Above all others she did the most.  
And for her lord, she has prayed so hard,  
To understand and know how he fared,  
That Juno, the goddess, heard her  
At length, and upon this matter  
She commanded Iris,<sup>1</sup> her messenger,  
To go to Sleep’s house,  
And bid him to arrange  
Through a dream to show all the circumstances  
To this lady, how it was.

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<sup>1</sup>Goddess of the rainbow and messenger of the gods.

This Yris fro the hihe stage  
Which vndertake hath the message  
Hire reyny cope dede vpon  
2980 The which was wonderli begon  
With colours of diverse hewe  
An hundred mo than men it knewe  
The hevene lich unto a bowe  
She bende and so she cam down lowe  
2985 The god of Slep wher that she fond  
And that was in a straunge lond  
Which marcheth upon Chymerie  
ffor ther as seith the Poesie  
The god of Slep hath mad his hous  
2990 Which of entaille is merveilous  
Under an hell ther is a caue  
Which of the sonne mai noght haue  
So that noman mai knowe ariht  
The point betuen dai and nyht  
2995 Ther is no fyr ther is no sparke  
Ther is no dore which may charke  
Wherof an yhe sholde unshette  
So that inward ther is no lette  
And forto speke of that withoute  
3000 Ther stant no gret tree nyh aboute  
Wheron ther myhte crowe or pie  
Alihte forto clepe or crie  
Ther is no cok to crowe day  
Ne beste non which noise may  
3005 The hell bot al aboute round  
Ther is growende vpon the ground  
Popi which berth the sed of slep  
With othre herbes suche an hep  
A stille water for the nones

This Iris, from on high,  
Who has undertaken the message,  
Donned her rainy cape,  
Which was wonderfully adorned,  
With colors of diverse hue,  
A hundred more than men could perceive,  
The heavens, like a bow  
She bent, and so she came down low,  
To where she found the God of Sleep.  
And that was in a strange land,  
In which is found the Chimera.  
For there, as the poetry says,  
The God of Sleep has made his house,  
Which is of a marvelous shape.  
Under a hill, there is a cave,  
Where the sun never shines.  
So no man may rightly know,  
The point between day and night.  
There is no fire; there is no spark.  
There is no door that may creak,  
Which could cause an eye to open,  
So that there is no way in.  
And to describe the outside of it:  
There stands no great tree nearby,  
On which a crow or magpie might  
Alight, and call or cry.  
There is no cock to crow the day,  
Nor any beast that may arouse  
The hill, but all round about,  
There is growing, upon the ground,  
Poppies, which bear the seed of sleep,  
Along with a heap of other herbs.  
A still water, for the nonce,

3010 Rennende vpon the smale stones  
Which hihte of Lethes the rivere  
Vnder that hell in such manere  
Ther is which yifith gret appetit  
To slepe and thus ful of delit  
3015 Slep hath his hous and of his couche  
Withinne his chambre if I shal touche  
Of hebenus that slepi tree  
The bordes al aboute be  
And for he sholde slepe softe  
3020 Vpon a fethrebed alofte  
He lith with many a pilwe of down  
The chambre is strowed vp and down  
With sweuenes many thousandfold.  
Thus cam Yris into this hold  
3025 And to the bedd which is al blak  
She goth and ther with slep she spak  
And in the wise as she was bede  
The message of Iuno she dede.  
Fulofte hir wordes she reherceth  
3030 Er she his slepi eres perceth  
With mochel wo bot ate laste  
His slombrende yhen he vpcaste  
And seide hir that it shal be do  
Wherof among a thousand tho  
3035 Withinne his hous that slepi were  
In special he ches out ther  
Thre which sholden do this dede  
The ferste of hem so as I rede  
Was Morpheus the whos nature  
3040 Is forto take the figure  
Of what persone that him liketh  
Wherof that he fulofte entriketh

Running over the small stones  
(Which is called the River of Lethe)  
Under that hill in such a manner,  
There is, which engenders a great appetite  
To sleep. And thus, full of delight,  
Sleep has his house. And of his bed  
Inside his chamber, if I may describe it,  
Of ebony, that sleepy tree,  
The boards all around it are.  
And in order that he might sleep softly,  
On a lofty featherbed  
He lies, with many a pillow of down.  
The chamber is strewn up and down,  
With many thousands of dreams.  
Thus Iris came into this hold,  
And to the bed, which is all black,  
She goes, and there with Sleep she spoke.  
And in the manner which she was bid,  
She delivered Juno's message.  
Time and again she repeats her words,  
Before she pierces his sleepy ears.  
With great reluctance, nevertheless, at last  
He cast up his slumbering eyes,  
And said to her that it shall be done.  
Whereupon, among a thousand then,  
Among those who were sleepy in his house,  
Especially he selected  
Three, who should perform this task:  
The first of them, as I read,  
Was Morpheus, whose nature  
Is to take the figure  
Of whatever person pleases him,  
Whereby he often ensnares

The lif which slepe shal be nyhte  
And Ithecus that other hihte  
3045 Which hath the vois of euery soun  
The chiere and the condicioun  
Of euery lif what so it is  
The thridde suiende after this  
Is Panthasas which may transforme  
3050 Of euery thing the rihte forme  
And change it in an other kinde  
Vpon hem thre so as I finde  
Of swevenes stant al thapparence  
Which otherwhile is evidence  
3055 And otherwhile bot a iape  
Bot natheles it is so shape  
That Morpheus by nyht al one  
Appiereth vntil Alceone  
In liknesse of hir housebonde  
3060 Al naked ded vpon the stronde  
And hou he dreynthe in special  
These othre tuo it shewen al  
The tempeste of the blake cloude  
The wode see the wyndes loude  
3065 Al this she mette and sih him dyen  
Wherof that she began to crien  
Slepende abedde ther she lay  
And with that noise of hire affray  
Hir wommen sterten vp aboute  
3070 Which of here ladi were in doute  
And axen hire hou that she ferde  
And she riht as she syh and herde  
Hir sweuene hath told hem euerydel  
And thei it halsen alle wel  
3075 And sein it is a tokne of good

The life that must sleep by night.  
And the other one was called Ithecus,  
Who has the voice of every sound,  
The appearance and condition  
Of every life, whatsoever it might be.  
The third, following after this,  
Is Panthasas, who may transform  
From everything, the correct form,  
And change it to another kind.  
Upon those three, as I find,  
Stands all the appearance of dreams,  
Which sometimes is evidence  
And other times is just a trick.  
But nevertheless, it is so arranged,  
That Morpheus, all alone, at night,  
Appears unto Alceone,  
In the likeness of her husband,  
All naked, dead upon the shore,  
And how he drowned, especially,  
These other two showed it all:  
The tempest of black clouds,  
The wild sea, the loud winds,  
All of this she dreamed, and saw him die.  
From which she began to crie,  
Where she lay, sleeping in bed,  
And with the noise of her fright,  
Her women awoke nearby,  
Who were afraid for their lady,  
And asked her how she fared.  
And she, just as she saw and heard,  
Her dream she told them, every detail.  
And they explained it very well,  
And saw it as a token of good.

Bot til she wiste hou that it stode  
She hath no confort in hir herte  
Vpon the morwe and vp she sterte  
And to the see wher that she mette  
3080 The bodi lay withoute lette  
She drouh and whan that she cam nyh  
Stark ded hise armes sprad she syh  
Hire lord flietende vpon the wawe  
Wherof hire wittes ben withdrawe  
3085 And she which tok of deth no kepe  
Anon forth lepte into the depe  
And wolde haue caucht him in hire arm  
This infortune of double harm  
The goddes fro the heuene aboue  
3090 Behielde and for the trouthe of love  
Which in this worthi ladi stod  
Thei haue vpon the salte flod  
Hire dreinte lord and hire also  
ffro deth to lyue torned so  
3095 That thei ben shapen into briddes  
Swimmende vpon the wawe amiddes  
And whan she sih hire lord liuende  
In liknesse of a bridd swimmende  
And she was of the same sort  
3100 So as she mihte do desport  
Vpon the ioie which she hadde  
Hire wynges bothe abrod she spradde  
And him so as she mai suffise  
Beclipte and keste in such a wise  
3105 As she was whilom wont to do  
Hire wynges for hire armes tuo  
She tok and for hire lippes soft  
Hire harde bile and so fulofte

But until she might know how it stood,  
She has no comfort in her heart  
In the morning, and up she jumped,  
And to the sea, where she dreamed  
The body lay, without delay  
She drew, and whan she came nigh,  
Stone dead, with his arms spread she saw,  
Her lord, floating upon the waves.  
Whereupon her wits deserted her,  
And she, who took no heed of death,  
Straight-away leapt forth into the deep,  
To try to catch him in her arms.  
This double mistfortune  
The gods from the heavens above  
Beheld, and for the truth of love  
That was in this worthy lady  
They have, upon the briny sea,  
Her drowned lord, and her also,  
Transformed from death into life so  
That they were turned into birds,  
Swimming amidst the waves.  
And when she saw her lord, living,  
In the likeness of a swimming bird,  
And that she was of the same sort,  
In order that she might take delight  
In the joy which she felt  
She spread both her wings out wide,  
And him, as well as she could,  
Hugged and kissed in such a fashion  
As she had previously been wont to do:  
Her wings for her two arms  
She took, and for her soft lips,  
Her hard bill. And so very often

3110 She fondeth in hire briddes form  
If that she mihte herself conforme  
To do the plesance of a wif  
As she dede in that other lif  
For thogh she hadde hir pouer lore  
Hir will stod as it was tofore  
3115 And serueth him so as she mai  
Wherof into this ilke day  
Togedre vpon the see thei wone  
Wher many a douhter and a sone  
Thei bringen forth of briddes kind  
3120 And for men shulden take in mynde  
This Alceoun the trewe queene  
Hire briddes yit as it is seene  
Of Alceoun the name bere  
LO THUS mi sone it mai thee stere  
3125 Of sweuenes forto take kepe  
ffor ofte time a man aslepe  
Mai se what after shal betide  
Forthi it helpeth at some tyde  
A man to slepe as it belongeth  
3130 Bot slowthe no life vnderfongeth  
Which is to loue appourtenant

She found that in her bird's form,  
Conforming herself thus,  
To perform the pleasures of a wife,  
As she did in that other life.  
For although she had lost her power,  
Her will remained as it was before,  
And she served him as well as she could.  
In consequence, unto this very day,  
Together upon the sea they dwell,  
Where many a daughter and a son  
They have brought forth of bird-kind.  
And so that men should keep in mind,  
This Alceone, the true queen,  
Her birds still, as it is seen,  
Bear the name of "Alceone."<sup>2</sup>  
LO, THUS my son, this may steer thee,  
To take heed of dreams.  
For often time, a man asleep,  
May see what shall afterward come to be.  
Therefore, it helps sometimes,  
For a man to sleep, as he must,  
But no life [i.e., "no one"] shall undertake Sloth  
That is committed to love.

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<sup>2</sup>I.e., "halcyon": a mythical bird, often identified with the kingfisher, and reported to breed during the winter solstice, at sea, in a floating nest. It is supposed to have the power to charm the seas and winds into calmness (hence the meaning of "halcyon" as calm, tranquil).