

**Frightful Dreams and Fearsome Fantasies:
Examples of Modernism, Romanticism and the Gothic
in Agatha Christie's Poetry**

An Overview on Christie's Literary Criticism

It is unnecessary to introduce Dame Agatha Christie, the Queen of Crime fiction, best-selling author of the genre ever since her very first novels and short stories were published. However, her oeuvre is far more versatile than what we can come across in the display of bookshops. Beside romantic novels, two autobiographies and many extremely successful theatre plays, she also was an aspiring poet. In my thesis I wish to analyse *The Road of Dreams*, a poem cycle containing some of the most exciting pieces of her poetry, introduce critics and critiques, and point out a logical answer to the obvious question: why do we know Agatha Christie as the Queen of Crime, instead of the Queen of Poetry?

Christie's poems were published twice during her life, secondly in 1973 (*Poems*), whereas the first publication date (*The Road of Dreams*) is unknown. Christie had to invest her own money to publish her first collection of poems (and it is reasonable to think that her publisher agreed to put only her crime fiction into print, in which she was absolutely successful), but its copyright page was released without any publication year indicated. The *English Catalogue of Books* dates this collection published by Geoffrey Bles back to 1925, while all the other authors in their Christie-bibliographies to 1924. Christie's *An Autobiography*, unfortunately, does not clarify the situation either, as it mentions no exact date. From the 1970s Christie's health slowly started to decline. Unable to write any further detective stories, finally her publisher (Collins at that time) decided on publishing her 'old' and some 'new' poems under the title *Poems*, released in 1973. The first volume of *Poems* is more or less comprised of the poems of *The Road of Dreams*, only partly rearranged and "Volume II" is the collection of the later ones.

In 1925, *The Times Literary Supplement* was the first to write a review on Christie's collection of poems. It stated that "[h]er talent [...] is too delicate to turn a ballad convincingly, despite her capacity for easy rhyming and infectious rhythm" (139). The review also warns readers that in certain cases such as "World Hymn 1914" in which the subject (namely writing about the recent outbreak of the First World War) "is too large for her hand to grasp [...]" "she descends to decorative common-places." At the same time the writer adds "[i]t is in such "Dreams and Fantasies" as "Beatrice Passes" that her real poetic gift is best displayed." *The Times Literary*

Supplement perfectly illustrates the complexity of Christie's poetry; it has simple but delightful rhymes, great poem cycles, but on the other hand, some subjects she experiments with are too complex for a thirty-four year old poet.

A month later *The Scotsman* published a similar critique, saying Christie “reveals a pleasing lyrical sense. The movement of her verse is light and graceful, and its substance, though not of “thought compact,” is “not empty” (139) Whereas *The Times Literary Supplement* highlighted “The Road of Dreams”, *The Scotsman* finds her first poem cycle in the collection the best, arguing that “[i]n the first collection of songs grouped together as “A Masque from Italy” – the players are the old and over-new Harlequin and company – Miss Christie is perhaps happiest. The poem is quite a charming bubble.”

In her posthumously released autobiographical novel, Christie unveils surprisingly few details of her relationship with her poetry. As a matter of curiosity, we learn that the first piece ever published by Christie in a local newspaper was a propaganda poem protesting against the new noisy trams reaching Ealing where she lived that time. She explains “[t]he trams came to Ealing – and local opinion immediately erupted into fury. A terrible thing to happen to Ealing; such a fine residential neighbourhood, such wide streets, such beautiful houses – to have trams clanging up and down!” (*An Autobiography* 129). Later on, she deals with poetry for some more pages, remembering “I, too, wrote poetry – perhaps everyone did at my age. Some of my earlier examples are unbelievably awful” (195). The poem she was content with, which also won “a guinea prize” (195) in *The Poetry Review* was “Down In The Wood,” the only poem she reproduces in her autobiography.

Since 1976, the death of Agatha Christie, several autobiographies have been released, some mentioning her poetry, some not even listing it in their list of her publications. In chronological order, Janet Morgan was the first to write a book of this kind (1984) arguing “[i]t is, apart from an occasional phrase, sentimental and derivative. One long sentence tells the story of Harlequin and Columbine, Pierrot and Pierrette, whose Dresden china figures decorated both Auntie-Grannie's house and Ashfield” (46). Morgan is one of the few writers trying to find an explanation for the self-expense publication conjecturing that “Agatha's feeling for security, in herself as a writer and in their joint finances, is demonstrated by her decision to publish her collected poems” (117). As far as I am concerned, I do not agree with Morgan, I believe that self-publication is a sign of how *important* it was for Christie to release her poems, whatever it took, rather than as a possible solution to her financial problems. Laura Thompson, in her book entitled *Agatha Christie: An English Mystery* (2007) comments on *The Road of Dreams* with the sentence “the works had clearly been written for the poet's own pleasure” (152). Although Thompson mentions Christie's poems,

apparently she does not wish to spend too much time analysing them.

Jared Cade, in his best-seller, *Agatha Christie and the Eleven Missing Days*, writes that while she “was never more than a pedestrian poet, publishing the collection enabled her to express the repressed romantic side of her nature she was unable to give reign to in her marriage” (45). It is not a secret that Christie was a mysterious woman, not often willing to give interviews; therefore I share Cade's explanation that it is a repressed side of Christie one can discover through her verses. He also adds, “[s]ignificantly, not one of her love poems celebrates the unqualified joys of love. They express the darker side of yearning, trepidation, despair, abandonment and loss” (226), with which I again see eye to eye. Earl F. Bargainnier, in his article on Christie's poetry concludes “[w]ith only one or two exceptions, Christie's poems could have been written before 1920. They are Romantic and Georgian in spirit: modernism is absent” (“The Poems of...”).

All in all, the poetry of Agatha Christie has not gained much critical acclaim. The early responses (*The TLS*, *The Scotsman*) try to give a succinct overview: they both highlight a pleasant and an unpleasant feature of her work. Despite the fact that Christie herself mentions her poetry in *An Autobiography* and also reproduces one of her poems (“Down in the Wood”) the reproduction lacks particularity because the indentions, the spaces and the italicised lines were not reproduced at all. Later on claiming that her poetry is not at all modern, it is (justifiably) not thoroughly commented on. Despite the mixed reviews and the relatively small amount of articles and book chapters dealing with Agatha Christie's poetry, for inquiring readers it would still be advisable to introduce a less known, a 'repressed side,' of the world's most famous crime fiction writer.

Christie's Romanticism in Modernist Ideas

Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre in their work, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, give a fairly romantic description of Romanticism itself, arguing that it is “revolutionary and counterrevolutionary, individualistic and communitarian, cosmopolitan and nationalistic, realist and fantastic, retrograde and utopian, rebellious and melancholic, democratic and aristocratic, activist and contemplative, republican and monarchist, red and white, mystical and sensual” (1). The authors vociferously try to draw readers' attention to the numerous misconceptions surrounding Romanticism and according to them, it would be almost impossible to give a precise definition of the movement. They argue that Romanticism cries against capitalism, it “represents a critique of modernity” (17), rather focusing on the past, leisurely wandering in visions and in imagination.

In connection with the poetry of Agatha Christie, a more concise paraphrasing of the Romanticism may seem useful. To begin with, the title of the poem cycle promises to take us with the writer to her “Dreams and Fantasies,” to a world where not many were allowed to step in since

Christie was famously introverted. Considering the title, readers may rightfully anticipate that a journey in dreams and visions are far from reality. When introducing a strange world only the poetic persona is familiar with, the author has to describe it in as many details as possible. According to Mihály Szegedy-Maszák, the creation of this world is the most crucial as it gives the true essence of Romanticism. More precisely he states that the author best performs his/her profession if (s)he creates a *purely* imaginary world (66).

Moreover, Christie was greatly influenced by the rather romantic values of her Auntie-Granny (her father's stepmother's niece). Her lifestyle is described in great detail, for example she slept in “an immense mahogany four-poster” bed (*An Autobiography* 38); also, she had a “drawing-room, crowded to repletion with marquetry furniture and Dresden china” (*An Autobiography* 39). Readers of the story of her life also get to know her most cherished tales and readings as a child: she was indeed fascinated by romantic (and sentimental) short stories, and was fond of Charles Dickens, basically because both her grandmother and mother read his stories to her when she was a child. Arguably, this childhood experience in connection with a very unpleasant presence of a nightmare where a frightening man, called the 'Gunman,' often visited her at night (*An Autobiography* 36) could result in composing rather sentimental poetry.

On the other hand one should never forget that as far as her era is concerned, Christie was born when Modernism gained ground in English literature. If Romanticism concentrates on the self, visions and the sentimental description of a visionary world, Modernism appears to be more universal, as it is – according to Julian Hanna – a “literature of crisis, crisis of value, crisis of language, crisis of knowledge, crisis of belief” (1). In this respect, Christie did try to introduce Modernist ideas in her poetry, as I have already stated, she did write about rather critical issues of her era (“World Hymn 1914”), yet we can argue that even this poem (again criticised in *The Time Literary Supplement* because the subject of it “is too large for her hand to grasp”) truly operates with fairly romantic images.

“World Hymn 1914” almost exclusively focuses on how women process the ordeal of war, they “pray with a catch in their breath,” while all the men pay (with their lives) on the battlefields. According to this idea, women equally share the struggle with men, offering prayers, spiritual help to protect their lovers. Later on in the poem, this image reappears and grows stronger and stronger. Women no longer pray in silence, but “[w]omen who work, and women who kneel / [c]rying aloud: 'How long? How long?'" (*Poems* 71), loudly protesting against the present, maybe because God apparently does not hear silent prayers anymore. Christie also uses the image of war birds flying in the sky, as a symbol of messengers between the Earth and God, maybe carrying the desperate prayers of women; moreover, since they are 'war birds' they can also be the “reappearances of the

dead” (Ferber 26) as the idea is introduced in Poe's “The Raven.”

Consequently, even in cases of presumably Modernist ideas, Christie's poetry remains reasonably romantic, when she speaks about a crisis; she decides to put it into a very sentimental point of view. Agreeing with all this, now we can observe whether Christie truly builds up a new, purely imaginary world through her “Dreams and Fantasies” or not.

The Theory in Practice

The first poem in Christie's poem cycle entitled “Dreams and Fantasies” is “The Dream Spinners,” which opens with three rhetorical questions: “*who shall see the Spinners?*” are they “*silent white-robed Spinners?*” and who can see them “[a]s *they spin the Thread of Dreams?*” These four italicized lines can grab readers' attention and may lead them into a false belief that these questions are soon going to be answered. However, the poem itself continues with numerous more questions setting up a perspective: first the poetic persona only asks readers whether they can see these strange little creatures or not, then the questions start to focus on details. In the third line of the italicized introduction, the Spinners are described as being “tender cruel” (*Poems* 51) emphasizing the paradox of their existence. On the one hand they are tender, but on the other hand the speaker draws attention to their characteristics, which are exactly the opposite.

As it can be detected from the first moment on, Christie uses capital letters when referring to symbols. A literature figure who often used capital letters in such cases was the American poet, Emily Dickinson, who can be referred as a precursor of Modernism, though scholars still argue whether capitalization should be regarded as an essential question in interpreting her poetry (Tanselle 110). Christie's symbols are the Spinners, the Thread of Dreams which slowly but surely (thanks to the hard-working Spinners) increases by pedalling the Wheel, therefore transforming into a Web of Dreams. Apparently, these symbols are elements of an extensive universe the speaker guides us to, as according to her, we evidently need a guide: the “who” in the very first line transforms into “you” and remains this way so that the reader is interconnected with the text until the very end: “*Oh! who shall find the Spinners? / The silent white-robed Spinners? The tender cruel Spinners / As they spin the Web of Dreams...*” (*Poems* 52), where the first stanza reappears with a slight change (in the end instead of a single Thread of a Dream, a complete Web materializes and instead of seeing the spinners the question is who can find them).

The rhyming of the poem is utterly arbitrary, but never more complex than rhyming couplets or three-four rhyming words with lines often ending on the very same word (for example “them”). This rhyming scheme does not exclusively refer to any lack of talent, but it fits the purpose of what

the speaker is trying to illustrate: the Spinners manipulate our dreams, they are the ones cruelly deciding what we are going to dream at night, what is more, they mesmerise us. The continuously moving wheel kept in motion by these evil creatures and the rhyming scheme enlarges the possibility of reading the poem almost as if we were instantly drawn to the world where dreams are made, we are bewitched and conjured away. It feels that this world is more like a sterile factory than anything else, and indeed the pure white robes the spinners wear strengthen this idea.

The third stanza elaborates on the topic that no one can escape from dreaming:

The conqueror from the battle by their gleam is led astray,
 Where the fragile threads enfold him – there his armour rusts away...
 The boy who goes a-ploughing at the dusky hour of eve
 Sees a Vision grey and golden – and his furrow he must leave.
 As the maiden in the village, who has knelt beside the lake,
 And has seen a Dream-face pictured – goes unwedded for his sake... (*Poems 51*)

It is almost a trivial issue to mention that everyone has to sleep, hence everyone is ought to benefit from the work of the spinners. The protective armour of a successful conqueror cannot be used against them, when “the fragile threads enfold him – there his armour rusts away.” It is advisable to observe that interestingly enough the threads are described as fragile, almost as is we should take care not to tear them, yet all they cause is death and destruction. Beside the conqueror, a boy ploughing late at night is also caught by the sleep and a maiden “who has knelt beside the lake” would become a victim of the spinners as she “goes unwedded for his sake” (*Poems 51*). A perspective of the operation of the spinners can also be noticed in the third stanza: first they mean harm only to objects, but later they appear as imminent danger to humans.

Towards the end of the poem, after the reader is guided and introduced into the Spinners' world, the questions and the descriptions turn into warnings in a stanza almost exclusively punctuated by exclamation marks. These reminders evolve into a desperate cry, as if the poetic persona spoke from experience. It is evident that she knows the world of the spinners, but now it is suggested that she might be a victim of their operation when she almost hypnotically chants how many beautiful traps they can establish by magnificent colours (red, golden, grey, green, white, silver and purple). Yet the paradox remains: if one cannot see the spinners, they cannot be found, but their whirring wheel may be heard.

Thereupon, the first poem of the cycle is heavy with symbols, questions, warnings, examples, paradoxes and contrasts setting up a Romantic vision of dreaming. The second poem, “Down in the Wood” (the only poem later reproduced in Christie's *An Autobiography*, but not in its original layout including indented and italicised lines), shows a bit more of Modernism as it almost

entirely lacks rhymes and something more modern sticks the lines together: recurring motifs. Moreover, evoking Old English poetry, a significant number of words alliterate within the lines of the poem.

The start of the poem is nearly ode-like, it opens with a contrast: “[b]are brown branches against a blue sky” (*Poems* 53). Concluding from the fact that there are no more leaves on the branches of the trees and all of them are under the poetic persona's feet, the poem takes place in the fall. The pace of the reading is very much limited by the great number of alliterations, and since the first line consists of seven words four of which start with a 'b' sound, it forces a relatively slow reading.

The poem can be easily connected to the first one in the cycle: during the day the woods may seem uninhabited and yet peaceful, at night its world rises. The beauty of the woods immediately disappears as soon as night comes, the sky changes into invisibility, only the “mad moon” reflects the rays of the sun, the peaceful, fallen leaves start stirring and a ghost appears in the woods, later suggested to be Death itself. One may argue that the second poem is written in a different style, yet it bears much resemblance to the first one in the cycle. The first poem also elaborated on the characteristics of the night: in both cases it is the most frightening time of all, it is not at all peaceful (the leaves are “[d]riven by Death in a devilish dance,” and in the first case the night is full of the sound of whirring wheels).

The introduction of the strange and frightful world of dreams continues in the third poem: “The Road of Dreams,” which is also the title poem of Agatha Christie's first volume of published poetry. Previously we have argued that Christie's versification (as far as this poem cycle is so far concerned) melts Modernism, Romanticism and arguably even some features of the Gothic as well. By looking at the poem, readers can anticipate that it is somehow different from the first two: it further plays with indented and italicized lines, but what are their functions?

Though Michael Ferber, the editor of *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols* warns readers that dreams are rather hard to interpret straightforwardly, since “they may refer to particular situations unique to the dreamer and interpretable only in context,” it would be advisable to consider what dreams symbolise throughout the Romanticism. According to the dictionary mentioned above, “dreamers enter a deeper or truer reality than the world of consciousness or reason.” Though generalization would not lead us to a proper conclusion, we still have examples of how Romantic authors paraphrased dreaming and its significance. For example “Shelley wonders if death, that resembles sleep, might be the portal to truth,” and consequently “the Romantics were restoring it [dreaming] to its ancient prestige, though without the divine agency that guaranteed it” (Ferber 65). Melting all these together, it appears that maybe the best way of analysing Christie's poem would be

to understand it as both a fictitious world the poetic persona wanders in, as well as a more universal variation of reality she discovers.

The poem consists of four stanzas where the first two appear to be alike in the number of lines, however, as it is clearly visible, the third and the fourth stanzas are shorter. One reason for this can be tracked if we consider the speaker's frightful journey on the road (presumably leading to the land of happiness) as a journey towards gaining knowledge and understanding. The stanzas become more and more concise as the poetic persona becomes better able to discover and see through the connotations and connections between what she sees and what the reality of the dream is.

The first stanza of “The Road of Dreams” opens with an idyll-like description of a dream.

The Road of Dreams leads up the Hill

So straight and white
 And bordered wide
 With almond trees on either side
 In rosy flush of Spring's delight!
 Against the frown
 Of branches brown
 The blossoms laugh and gleam
 Within my dream...

(Poems 54)

The road the speaker walks on is straight (therefore it is easy to follow), pure white and is bordered with almond trees. Since later they are described to be blossoming, we can assume that this particular dream vision takes place in the spring, because almond trees belong to the group of trees blossoming relatively early in the year, as the next line directly confirms inquiring readers' anticipation. Almond trees are especially interesting on the grounds that they usually symbolise “spring's arrival or more precisely a prophecy of its arrival” (Ferber 9). Thereupon by describing blossoming trees of this kind, the author secretly accentuates that her joy and anticipation might be slightly premature, she is not yet in the state of having experienced enough.

Not only does the first stanza open with an idyll but conserves it within the whole unit: readers are led into a false belief that this poem may introduce a more pleasant side of dreaming.

The second stanza continues to build the idyllic vision.

There is no Joy like Joy in dreams...

Up – up the Hill
 My flying feet
 Go magically winged and fleet

And like a bird that flies at will!
 So shall I find
 What God designed
 There – where the Open Country lies
 Before my eyes...

(*Poems 54*)

The speaker of the poem continues her journey upwards, anticipating that from the top of the hill she will be able to take a look at a strange country, a land which God himself designed. The joy she feels lifts her feet up and she feels as if she were flying towards her destination; although she is climbing a mountain she does not feel tired at all. Readers may feel how peculiar 'the will' is which drives the speaker. So far it is not directly said what the reason of her going is, we do not even know whether she is familiar with what she is about to find, or not, but one thing emerges through the image of birds, flying and the vision of an 'Open Country' protected by a hill: the speaker wishes for freedom, maybe freedom from her fear in her dreams.

The third, visibly shorter stanza of the poem is more than special. It opens with a completely unexpected contrast regarding the previous stanzas, as well as ends in two exclamations that revalue both the first and the second stanzas.

There is no Fear like Fear in dreams...

Which, swift as Death
 Pursuing fast,
 Gains on me, till I feel at last
 Upon my neck its icy breath...
 The Dream is dead!
 The Joy is fled!

(*Poems 54*)

Instead of the long-anticipated moment when the speaker reaches the top of the hill and glimpses at the 'Open Country' designed by God, all of a sudden she feels an “icy breath” upon her neck. One possible interpretation of this out-of-a-sudden event could come from Christie's *An Autobiography*, where she describes how the mysterious Gunman (partly mentioned in Chapter 1) would appear in her childhood nightmares. She writes: “[t]he dream would be quite ordinary – a tea-party, or a walk with various people, usually a mild festivity of some kind. Then suddenly a feeling of uneasiness would come” (36). However, since the Gunman himself does not directly appear in any of the lines, it is not evident to connect the experience of the speaker with the life of the author, yet it suggests the possibility to link the poetic persona's experience with the appearance of the Gunman in

Christie's dreams.

The fourth stanza of the poem is even more concise and it is indeed curious in its appearance. The speaker draws a sorrowful conclusion based on her observation: maybe she will not ever be able to reach her cherished destination in her lifetime.

The Road of Dreams
Leads up the Hill and faintly gleams...
Oh! Dream most fond,
What lies beyond?
Beyond the Hill...

(*Poems* 55)

A tempting question – whether this journey was the first of this kind for the poetic persona – is left open, we do not get to know anything in particular. Even the existence of the deeply believed 'Open Country' is questioned in this unit, the last but one line is a rhetorical question supposing the doubtfulness of the speaker, who in the beginning felt as if she were flying, concentrated on the blossoming almond tress and the colours surrounding the road, and now questions the very existence of an ideal place she so desperately wants to believe in.

Notwithstanding, the poem is full of symbols. As we have mentioned it in the beginning of this chapter, the dream itself can be regarded as an important symbol of 'a road to understanding,' featuring in a vast range of works of art. Later, the 'Open Country' can stand for Heaven, since its creator is named to be God. In the second stanza, a 'bird' is mentioned who “flies at will” (*Poems* 54), standing for the arrival of spring, moreover, they arguably support the religious tone of the poem: “[b]ecause they can fly, and seem to link the sky with the earth and sea,” they “also resemble gods, so the ancients often considered birds either incarnations of gods or their messengers” (Ferber 26). In addition, considering the idea of the breathing death, the mysterious being's ability to breathe makes the poem even more frightening as “[b]reath is life, and those who draw breathe are those who are alive” (Ferber 26). What is more, we could even consider the first stanza's line – “branches brown” (*Poems* 54) – an autopoietic metaphor, since Christie herself used this image in “Down in the Wood,” where she also put this line – more precisely: “brown branches” (*Poems* 53) – in the opening part of the poem, misleading readers that they are going to read about something entirely pleasant, in this case about dreaming; while in that case, about a quiet autumn forest.

Considering the visual appearance of the poem, we can further argue that each indented, non-rhyming line in the stanzas stand as 'topic sentences.' For example the third stanza's 'topic sentence' tells us about the fear which can only be experienced while we are in a dream, and the whole stanza keeps building up how fear itself spreads in the poetic persona, and in the end it kills

the dream and makes the joy flee. In this respect, it is even odder why the 'topic sentence' of the last stanza comes in the end. A possible interpretation could be that this sentence is not only the 'topic sentence' of the last stanza (although it perfectly suits the role of a delayed indication), but it melts together the essence of the whole poem: understanding comes from experience.

Mentioning that the italicized 'topic sentences' do not rhyme in the poem, we should discover what kinds of rhymes can be detected otherwise, and that to what extent they are the characteristics of Modernism or Romanticism. The first stanza contains couplets (keeping in mind that in all cases there is a non-rhyming italicised 'topic sentence'), while the second starts with an enclosed rhyme and finishes with two couplets. The third stanza is very similar to the second one, of the sense that it also opens with an enclosed rhyme, but it finishes in a couplet instead of two, whereas the last stanza contains two couplets. It is evident that these rhymes are not at all uncommon schemes to choose in the Romantic period; still they connect the ever-shortening stanzas of the poem satisfactorily.

Hence, the second poem of the cycle, "Dreams and Fantasies," also the title poem of Christie's first volume of poetry continues to present the frightful realities of dreams. Whereas earlier we got to know the evil dream spinners and a dreadful forest coming to life at night time, this poem introduces the fragility of our imagination. One can never be sure when he/she will be attacked by an unwanted guest even in his/her dreams. The three poems introduced also prove that Christie's dream vision poems are not truly innovative in her era, though she structures her poems carefully (both visually and in terms of maintaining the atmosphere created earlier), their message is nothing new.

Consequently, as far as Christie's poetry is concerned, delivering a message occurs to be much more significant than playing with words and using complex rhyme schemes. It occurs that Christie tried to paint an immensely detailed picture on the dreadfulness of dreaming from as many viewpoints as possible. She magically built up an apparently Romantic vision of a strange world full of wonders. However, these wonders are not at all peaceful and miraculous, but frightening, dark and formidable. What is more, accepting David Punter and Glennis Byron's definition of the Gothic (taking the sounds of the night and the sharp contrasts as recurring tropes into consideration) as something "more to do with particular moments, tropes, repeated motifs that can be found scattered, or disseminated, through the modern western literary tradition" (xviii), we may conclude that Christie's poetry is a mixture of modernist and romantic features with specific Gothic attributions, but all in all and probably most importantly, they are heavily personal and paint a frightful image of the world of the night.

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Appendix: Poems Introduced¹

The Dream Spinners

*Oh! who shall see the Spinners?
The silent white-robed Spinners?
The tender cruel Spinners
As they spin the Thread of Dreams?*

Can you hear the Wheel a-whirring?
And the menace of its purring?
See the colour of a rainbow as it gleams?
Can you see the shining mesh
That is spun for human flesh?
Can you hear them?
Do you fear them?
Will you dare to wander near them?
The silent white-robed Spinners
As they spin the Web of Dreams...

The conqueror from the battle by their gleam is led astray,
Where the fragile threads enfold him – there his armour rusts away...
The boy who goes a-ploughing at the dusky hour of eve
Sees a Vision grey and golden – and his furrow he must leave.
As the maiden in the village, who has knelt beside the lake,
And has seen a Dream-face pictured – goes unwedded for his sake...

Oh! if your eyes shall see them,
You had better turn and flee them,
For no power born of earth shall hold you then.
And you'll let the world go by,
Seeking Beauty till you die!
If you hear them,
Oh! beware them!
And never venture near them!
The silent white-robed Spinners
As they spin the Thread of Drams...

There are Threads of Red and Golden!
There are Threads of Grey and Green!
There are Threads of White and Silver. And they merge in dazzling sheen!
There's a Web of wondrous weaving that is Rose and Amethyst,
And a Purple Strand of Mystery that fades into the mist...
And oh! There's love and longing! There's a heart to laugh and grieve,
There's Wonder... and there's Pity – where the white-robed Spinners weave...

*Oh! who shall find the Spinners?
The silent white-robed Spinners?
The tender cruel Spinners
As they spin the Web of Dreams...*

¹ Christie, Agatha. *Poems*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1973: 51-55.

Down in the Wood

BARE brown branches against a blue sky
 (*And Silence within the wood*),
 Leaves that, listless, lie under your feet,
 Bold brown boles that are biding their time
 (*And Silence within the wood*).
 Apring has been fair in the fashion of youth,
 Summer with languorous largesse of love,
 Autumn with passion that passes to pain,
 Leaf, flower, and flame – they have fallen and failed

And Beauty – bare Beauty is left in the wood!

Bare brown branches against a mad moon
 (*And Something that stirs in the wood*),
 Leaves that rustle and rise from the dead,
 Branches that beckon and leer in the light
 (*And Something that walks in the wood*).
 Skirling and whirling, the leaves are alive!
 Driven by Death in a devilish dance!
 Shrieking and swaying of terrified trees!
 A wind that goes sobbing and shivering by...

And Fear – naked Fear passes out of the wood!

The Road of Dreams

The Road of Dreams leads up the Hill
 So straight and white
 And bordered wide
 With almond trees on either side
 In rosy flush of Spring's delight!
 Against the frown
 Of branches brown
 The blossoms laugh and gleam
 Within my dream...

There is no Joy like Joy in dreams...
 Up – up the Hill
 My flying feet
 Go magically winged and fleet
 And like a bird that flies at will!
 So shall I find
 What God designed
 There – where the Open Country lies
 Before my eyes...

There is no Fear like Fear in dreams...
 Which, swift as Death
 Pursuing fast,
 Gains on me, till I feel at last
 Upon my neck its icy breath...
 The Dream is dead!
 The Joy is fled!

The Road of Dreams
 Leads up the Hill and faintly gleams...
 Oh! Dream most fond,
 What lies beyond?
Beyond the Hill...