“Incantation of Dreams (Part Three)” is an actual dream of mine re-told with the greatest possible fidelity. One of the issues that interested me in this series [of which “(Part Three)” is the most successful] was trying to develop a syntax and format for verbally describing dreams, which are perhaps the quintessential visual phenomena. Ordinary grammar is governed by a linear logic which seems diametrically opposed to the simultaneity and nebulous flow of the dreams, and our habits of describing most other visual phenomena offer little help (unless thrown into a reflexive relief) with these linguistic limitations. Painting criticism involves itself with the discussion of the implications of static tableaux, which, as far as dreams are concerned, tends to be hyper-critical in that the speed and radical change within dreams usually by-pass the possibility of logical extrapolation. Our style of re-telling average occurrences is dominated by the conventions of written fiction and fictional film (ironically, since the technical devices of film—cut, dissolve, matte—are closer to dream syntax than any other mechanical processes), which again tend to impose a critical, linear logic over the concurrence, alteration, and fluidity of even everyday, waking events.

Another extreme problem with verbalization is that it tends to induce an unnecessary and untruthful specificity. When you happen to hear someone else, or yourself, retell a dream several times, you usually find the account becoming more detailed, and also, frequently you will find formulas substituted for the primary experience (e.g., “It was in an unfamiliar house...”), then later “But now that I think of it, it reminded me of a place I used to live...”, then still later the characteristics of the familiar house begin to be described as a sort of convenience or shorthand for the unfamiliar, often vague components of the original dream house.

Now, I certainly haven’t overcome any of these problems definitively, but it has been interesting trying.

THE INCANTATION OF DREAMS (PART THREE)

Sunset. Serenely
Into the bathroom where against the floor in one corner
lay the door to a laundry bin,
Stooping to pull the door ajar with one hand
But to find the clothes-already-there suffused with luminous
soft hues,
Stooping lower—there, previously unnoticed (!) perhaps because of the now angle necessary to see it
A stained glass window showing
On the left, a garden (somewhat Art Nouveau) of pink tulips and mauve hyacinths
Presided over by laden jacarandas and swayed pepper branches
Belonging to the Victorian mansion on the right that sports
A bay window also containing stained glass imagery
A garden of scarlet poppies
on the banks of a lotus pond
Where arbors copy arches
above and beyond
And on the sill of that depicted window
Perches an opaque raven cold as glass
And bound by lead around to hold his place
Tossing a handful of used socks and shirts
In haste to tell the others of this wonder
Reaching to touch the window to be sure
Suddenly a scorpion scuttles across the clothes-already-there,
maybe escaping the trajectory of new arriving
Recoiling [Fear] but as the beast makes off across the tiffany landscape
The raven comes animated and gobbles it up,
Returning afterwards its drawn margins to lead bonds again
No flutter warmth nor feather to the touch remain
Down the hall to find the others
To meeting comes gliding him wearing fluid robes
His slow-motion feet seem floating hover the floor
Bearing a framed illumination in his hands
A river beds triangular between two banks
The water rendered in the style of rajput miniatures
(Silver spirals speaking out as waves against the glowing cobalt blue)
But the shores stamped out in open areas like Edo wood-block prints:
The right side—pale mustard hills with one oak tree—
Showing orderly rows of soldiers wait to board barges,
Their crimson cut-away tail-coats reminiscent of roaches,
Funnelling across a ford
But when they disembark on the far bank,
They scatter in disarray across the dunes,
Taking cover in an olive grove.
The title (verso) reads:
"THE RED-COATS ARE COMING"
"THE RED-COATS ARE COMING"
"THE RED-COATS ARE COMING"
"If je du de dis ez, αl giv je dis," he said.