At the mountainous border of our two countries there is a village; it stands just below a pass, but some of the older houses lie higher up along the road, overlooking more of the valley than one might think. The border has never been heavily guarded, and our countries are peaceful. Theirs lies beyond the pass; in the other valley a large village looks up toward the mountains and toward us. The border itself is marked only by an occasional sign; but then there is the Trumpeter. His clear, triadic melodies break out through the frosty air, or through the swirling mists. From below, from above, the sound is commandingly clear, and it seems to divide the air as the border divides the land. It can be heard at no fixed intervals, and yet with a regularity which we accept, but cannot calculate. No one knows whether the Trumpeter is theirs or ours.

[Epigraph to The Head of the Bed]

This is a text. The dream which it embodies (or: surrounds? misremembers? embroiders upon with the kind of fierce fancy-work that becomes the fabric itself? interprets? reports?—even to fix on a verb here would be to enmesh a whole poetic theory), the dream related to it, is now barely accessible to me, the text having replaced it. I now cannot help but feel that it was originally dreamed for its textual role; although that feeling is itself a fiction which replaces buried, but probably useless, psychic history, it was a feeling that dawned on the occasion of incorporating the text in an earlier poem called "The Head of the Bed."

The dream as I remember it was a broad prospect—out at which I looked—all in the grays of etching and aquatint, of the mountain scene; I heard the trumpet, and knew in the dream that there was a Trumpeter, just as I had the sense (not from that kind of inner fiat, of axiom or identification revealed to the dreamer but from the landscape itself) that this was border territory. This was the kind of dream that arises in the fringes of sleep, and I awoke at the sounds of the trumpeting—at rather than to them, as to an alarm clock or some other noise in the eternally awakened world which the trumpet call absorbed and transformed. It was as I awoke—just after it—that the question came to me in the light of my bedroom, and with a sense not of immediate urgency but of profound importance: Was that trumpeter theirs or ours?

It was some days later that I transcribed the dream in the present form, and I think that without knowing it I had even then my own recently completed (and, even
to myself, still puzzling) “The Head of the Bed” in mind. That poem in 15 parts is itself a figurative dream-journey, moving in and out of a protagonist’s sleeping and waking states. Its first three parts, written early in 1971, all concern the shores of sleep as a place for the generation of images. The whole poem starts out:

Heard through lids slammed down over darkened glass,
Trees shift in their tattered sheets, tossing in
Shallow sleep underneath the snoring wind.

A dream of forests far inside such sleep
As wakeful birds perched high in a dread wood,
Brooding over torn leaves, might mutter of
Rises over the pain of a snapped twig...

But although some of the episodes are explicitly dreamt in the poem’s fictional narrative and some are actually encountered by the protagonist, there is only one scrap of material from any actual dream of my own (the flood scene, in section 12) anywhere in the poem. As I transcribed the Trumpeter dream—and perhaps even by transcribing it—I may have been completing, as well as glossing, the whole poem, which had been otherwise finished for the best part of a year.

When I added the text as an epigraph to “The Head of the Bed,” I had already decided that the two countries in it were the realms of sleep and waking, and that the Trumpeter was a sort of liminal figure, a shore-warden who patrolled and celebrated whatever was at the line of division. Attaching it to the poem entailed interpreting the last line, and thereby the whole text (the last line itself being an avowal of the unanswerability of the question into which I awoke from the dream). This was some years before I had read the ingenious theory of a young friend, to the effect that, in Chaucer’s Reeve’s Tale, the place where the two Cambridge students avail themselves of the bodies of the miller’s wife and daughter is made to be the village of Trumpington not merely because that village is in fact “nat fer fro Cantebrigg” but to pun on the French tromper, or deceiving. Perhaps my Trumpeter anticipated that conceit: a rubbing of the memorial brass of Sir Roger de Trumpington with a trumpet as his armorial bearing hung near my desk, and I had always brooded on the epithet of the fabled apocalyptic bugle, the Last Trump, both as a final card, kept in reserve, that won all for one and lost it for all the rest, as well as a tromperie dernière, a cruel eschatological joke. But if there was any tromperie in the trumpeteting, it was, I realize now that I then concluded, elided into the higher cozenings of trope.

I should say something here about my earlier comment about not understanding my own poem, “The Head of the Bed,” at the time I added the prose epigraph. It seems superficially perverse or inaccurate to say that one has not understood something that he has written, revised, considered and so forth. In this case, I mean that although I was sure of every word in the text, sure of phrases and cadences, and certain of the order of the 15 sections (which was, with some exceptions, not the mere order of composition, but rather a complex reconsidered response to that order), I could not at that point have written a plausible or coherent “argument” for the poem, or an essay on it. Indeed, I had the astonishing and invigorating experience of discovering, after it was published in full form in 1974 with an interpretive essay by Harold Bloom, that I had misconstrued the poem myself. Bloom had suggested that a female figure I had felt to be warm, reassuring and beneficent, who appears in the final section, was “not wholly distinguishable” from the final appearance of the other female figure, the witch Lilith, the patroness of bad nights, who shows up throughout the poem. I was, indeed, somewhat miffed at being incorporated into an interpretive figure, a figure designed to give symmetry and structure to a reading, rather than to cope, at just that point, with the text itself. I
turned out to be quite wrong, and subsequent events in my life convinced me that the poem was indeed associating the two presences; that, like a dream, it knew more than I did about the harmful character of a force I had only felt to be protective heretofore.

Ironically, this later interpretive revision does not concern any actual “dream material” in the poem. Adding the epigraph was itself, I have said, an act of interpretation, both of the dream-text and the poem; and the one phrase which manifestly connects the poem and the epigraph, itself appears in the second tercet of the final section, and, I now realize, significantly introduces the ambiguous beneficent figure who had entered the poem as I wrote it only in guise. The section opens with allusively apocalyptic images, and leads up to the introduction of the warm companion who I believed I was contrasting to the witch, “Lilting Miss Noctae,” later on in the episode:

The bright moon offends him: he plucks it out;
He opens all the seals of touch: he hears
The whirlwinds of his breathing: then it comes:

A last waking to a trumpet of light
From warm lamps turns him over gravely toward
Her long, bare figure, Lady Evening...

But it has only been the consideration, at the suggestion of the editor of this issue, of the Trumpeter dream that has led me to notice some of these patterns and juxtapositions, and some of the ways in which poem and dream seem to interpret each other. I have also been led to remember the first occasion on which I ever consciously referred to a dream of my own in any poem. For years I had never done so; the first poem to include anything from a dream was, I now remember, the first poem I ever wrote which left me with the feeling I have had much more frequently in recent years, of not knowing what my poem was really “about.” The dream in question was a nightmare of early childhood, involving my maternal grandmother, to whom I was quite close, confronting me in a normal manner, but with her face totally crimson in color. The poem, written in 1965, involved actual recollections, too, of childhood fascination and terror at the sight of myself in a bedroom mirror in my darkened bedroom at night. In its final form “The Night Mirror” has its child protagonist, its frightened awakener, choose the terrors of dream over those of potential vision:

The Night Mirror
What it showed was always the same—
A vertical panel with him in it,
Being a horrible bit of movement
At the edge of knowledge, overhanging
The canyons of nightmare. And when the last
Glimpse was enough—his grandmother,
Say, with a blood-red face, rising
From her Windsor chair in the warm lamplight
To tell him something—he would scramble up,
Waiting to hear himself shrieking, and gain
The ledge of the world, his bed, lit by
The pale rectangle of window, eclipsed
By a dark shape, but a shape that moved
And saw and knew and mistook its reflection
In the tall panel on the closet door
For itself. The silver corona of moonlight

JOHN HOLLANDER
That gloried his glimpsed head was enough
To send him back into silences (choosing
Fear in those chasms below), to reject
Freedom of wakeful seeing, believing
And feeling, for peace and the bondage of horrors
Welling up only from deep within
That dark planet head, spinning beyond
The rim of the night mirror’s range, huge
And cold, on the pillow’s dark side.

Syntactically, this poem is far from easy, and the narrative structure bore too much weight for me to do anything other than accept it. While aware of all the grammatical ambiguities of the title phrase, “the night mirror”—that which mirrored at night, mirrored night itself, and so forth—and intentionally engaging them in the poem, I knew no more of the whole than that it had to be the way it was, and, more mysteriously, that it was a very important poem for me even though, I must confess, I did not particularly like it. It was problematic in length, in genre, in form—free-verse lines centering on four stresses, but casually so—and its three long periods felt like a physical deformity of my own that I had to live with. But in its association for me now with the dream of the Trumpeter, and with the poem which claimed, elicited, misinterpreted it (or whatever), it has settled into a new kind of place for me. The “night mirror” is both mirror and lamp, reflecting, cold satellite moon of night vision and sun of informing light, that appears at the end of the poem in a mediating position between planet and pillow, both within and beyond the sleeper-waker’s head. It is the mimetic-expressive mirror of my own imagination, and a frightening one; the image of the “the head of the bed” was born in that poem, although I would not know it until long after its rebirth as the title (added after composition of all fifteen sections) of the later poem. “The Night Mirror” was a parable about the relation of poem and dream which I wrote for my own instruction at the time, and if it fell among thorns at first, it eventually worked its way down to good ground.

Writing this now, I have come to see that the parable could not have been explicit at the time. I was just beginning in those years to read Spenser with poetic seriousness, and beginning to understand how The Interpretation of Dreams—surely one of the greatest works of criticism of our age—was making the quality of dream available for serious poetic consideration. I mean by this that any earnest, modernist literary aspirant of the 1950’s, told in impressionistic, belle-letristic essays that Spenser’s world of faerie had the glory and the freshness of the land of dreams, would fling such essays aside with an oath, convinced that the quality of dream for such a writer meant imprecision, flight from signification, botched mimesis, steam filling the lower half of a Dali-like set in a bad movie, and so forth. Freud’s masterpiece in fact treated dreams as if they were as serious as poems, and thereby made the notion of dream serious enough to be likened, by a conceptual adult, to poetry, without invoking all of the qualities that one knew poetry, as opposed to sentimental bad writing, always had to shun.

In any event, the text-dream relation in my earlier poem was a trope for the imagination: that much I have understood for some time. In a poem of the spring of 1974 (written some months after the publication of chapbook form of “The Head of the Bed”) called “The Train” I worked some of the landscape from recurring dreams of my own and of my wife of twenty years from whom I was just then separated; it was as if perhaps to augment imagination’s power over events it could only represent. “The Train” concerns two fictional dreamers, lying beside each other in bed, dreaming overlapping—or, in the mythology of the poem, interpenetrating—dreams. Actual dreams of transportation systems, missed connections and of a particular, unique dream which had in fact recently been “shared” by two sleepers
in bed together, composed the scenery of various episodes in the poem, which were
connected by continuing glimpses of a train—the train of the poem’s thought—
making its way through a larger landscape. Sometimes, in a tunnel, it became the
actual sexual penetration of one of the sleepers by the other, and similarly one
dream “inside” another one. That railroad cross-ties are called “sleepers” provides
another mode of connection between the metaphoric train and the dreamers in
and around the poem.

I don’t think that I could have managed “The Train” (a poem which I prize
highly) without having come to terms with the meta-relation, as it were, of three
relations between dream and text: (1) allusion to actual dreams of one’s own, (2)
narrative fictions of dreaming in the text, and (3) the condition of poetry—or genre
of poem, if one must, or intensity of poetic force—which allows a poetic text, no
matter how carefully contrived and constructed, to escape from the hand of the
poet’s wit, and partake of the unwitting poesis of dream-work. Poems are neither
night-dreams nor day-dreams, which is something the ambiguous nationality of the
Trumpeter may be asserting.

It was only having to comment on the trumpeting-dream that occasioned my
reassessment of it, the whole poem to which it was added, and “The Night Mirror.” I
realize now that in these remarks I have been treating that early poem as a kind of
inner vocation. It is only having gone along so far in reconstructing that leads me
back again to the meaning of the later parable I told myself, the parable of the
Trumpeter. Theirs or ours? Sleeping or waking? I now read it as a fable of what trope
is, of where its home is, travel widely though it may; a fable not of the sea of figure as
opposed to the literal shore, but of a division made at right angles to the coast-line,
as it were, by which what lay on either side the boundary would look identical.

But if I now see something else as well. Sleep has a brother kingdom, and the
trumpeter of trope, the music of representation, play at the boundary of Death and
Life in this wise: fictions, the lies we tell ourselves to avert the continuing and
otherwise paralyzing gaze of death, the way in which those fictions lie not against
truth so much as against time, must ultimately serve the cause of Life. But perhaps,
in another kind of tromperie derniere, they may actually be in the employ of Death,
whose ultimate victory may be augmented by the loss of any intervening apparent
battles. Is our imagination, then, brave or pitiable? No one can ever know whether
the Trumpeter is theirs or ours.

“The Night Mirror” was the title poem of a book published in 1971. Harold Bloom’s essay is in print in his

JOHN HOLLANDER
The "dream aesthetics" in my work would be most obvious in such a poem as "Walking to Sleep," which derives from a sort of exploratory dreaming which I experience (and some others, apparently, do not), or in the later poem "In Limbo," which has to do with the conversing of all one's selves and ages in the hypnopompic state. But even where dreaming is not the subject, I know that the drifting, linking and swerving of my poetry is often modelled—even while I strive for a conscious clarity and point—on the flow of consciousness in dream. I also know that it was my own experience as a dreamer which first led me—reading a paperback in a foxhole at Monte Cassino—to sense a submerged pattern of psychic action in the fiction of Poe, about whom I have since written a number of interpretive essays.

You ask for "a dream," and I am not sure whether to give you one which I understand or one which I do not. When I was sixteen, I dreamt of the appearance of an equestrian figure—a cowboy, I think—on the road which led past the gate of the walled vegetable-garden and rounded the manure-house behind the barn. The figure gestured to the pine-grove across the garden, and to a range of hazy blue mountains, Rockies-like, which had never appeared behind the pine-grove before. In a deep, oracular voice, which seemed to be speaking close to my ear, the rider said, "Those are the Old Catica Mountains." I woke up with a feeling of awe, but with no comprehension, and forty years later I feel the same about that comparatively uneventful dream, wherein large and craggy Western forms are glimpsed above a New Jersey farm's horizon. If anyone were to take the first and last syllables of that strange word "Catica," and connect them with the manure-house, I should not thank him for it; a sixteen-year-old boy who has grown up on a farm takes the manure-house for granted, and I did not know the word caca at that age.

Perhaps the old dream still resounds for me (the greatest force is in the words of it) because it was simple and soluble and yet escaped me; by which I mean that my waking mind never came to share it. A similar dream, a bit more than a decade later, was understood at once, enjoyed, and put away amongst fathomed experiences. At that time I was busy in left-wing politics, and not long before the dream had helped a young woman gather a great quantity of articles which were to be auctioned for the benefit of a radical organization. One item was a mantilla, which the young woman tried on, and which rather became her. The organization, by the way, was ostensibly concerned with relief for anti-Franco exiles and the like. A short time after the auction, during a house-party at Wellfleet, I behaved somewhat improperly toward, or with, the young woman, and afterward did not feel quite easy about it. The dream which summed all this up had no visual content which I can remember; what it amounted to was a resonant voice which intoned, just as I was waking up, "The Spanish Cape Mystery!" There was a mystery novel of that title knocking around our apartment at the time; the author, I believe, was Erle Stanley Gardner. It will be seen, however, that the title served, within my dream, to recall the Spanish civil war, the mantilla, the furtiveness of "front-group" politics, Cape Cod, and such guilt as I

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felt about the girl. Its effect was to remind me of something in a veiled manner; at the same time, the reminder was so tricky and portentous as to amount to a recommendation that something be recognized and then laughed off.

One more dream, which seems to me both hilarious and embarrassing, because I cannot bear self-pity or feelings of nobility. This dream occurred at a time when I had been, as they say, "pressing myself very hard," and apparently felt that I was neglecting my own work or pleasure for the sake of others. In the dream I was standing in a highway some distance from a little town. A steam-roller, driven by myself, came toward me as I stood there, and my spirit therefore prudently flew up and looked down on the goings-on. When the steam-roller had passed over my body, it lay in the road like a rolled-out ginger cookie; it was not, however, light-brown in color, as gingerbread-men are, but was full of red and blue traceries resembling the representations of innards in medical books. Whereupon, like a piece of wrapping-paper driven by a gale, my body was peeled from the road-surface and whipped across intervening fields to the village, where it at once became a stained-glass window in a church. I believe that this dream requires no explanation, but I report it because, though emotionally disgraceful, it is visually clever and delightful.

WALKING TO SLEEP

As a queen sits down, knowing that a chair will be there,
Or a general raises his hand and is given the field—glasses,
Step off assuredly into the blank of your mind.
Something will come to you. Although at first
You nod through nothing like a fogbound prow,
Gravel will breed in the margins of your gaze,
Perhaps with tussocks or a dusty flower,
And, humped like dolphins playing in the bow-wave,
Hills will suggest themselves. All such suggestions
Are yours to take or leave, but hear this warning:
Let them not be too velvet green, the fields
Which the deft needle of your eye appoints,
Nor the old farm past which you make your way
Too shady-linteled, too instinct with home.
It is precisely from Potemkin barns
With their fresh-painted hex signs on the gables,
Their sparkling gloom within, their stanchion-rattle
And sweet breath of silage, that there comes
The trotting cat whose head is but a skull.
Try to remember this: what you project
Is what you will perceive; what you perceive
With any passion, be it love or terror,


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May take on whims and powers of its own.
Therefore a numb and grudging circumspection
Will serve you best, unless you overdo it,
Watching your step too narrowly, refusing
To specify a world, shrinking your purview
To a tight vision of your inching shoes—
Which may, as soon you come to think, be crossing
An unseen gorge upon a rotten trestle.
What you must manage is to bring to mind
A landscape not worth looking at, some bleak
Champaign at dead November’s end, its grass
As dry as lichen, and its lichens grey,
Such glumly simple country that a glance
Of flat indifference from time to time
Will stabilize it. Lifeless thus, and leafless,
The view should set at rest all thoughts of ambush.
Nevertheless, permit no roadside thickets
Which, as you pass, might shake with worse than wind;
Revoke all trees and other cover; blast
The upstart boulder which a flicking shape
Has stepped behind; above all, put a stop
To the known stranger up ahead, whose face
Half turns to mark you with a creased expression.
Here let me interject that steady trudging
Can make you drowsy, so that without transition,
As when an old film jumps in the projector,
You will be wading a dun hallway, rounding
A newel post, and starting up the stairs.
Should that occur, adjust to circumstances
And carry on, taking these few precautions:
Detach some portion of your thought to guard
The outside of the building; as you wind
From room to room, leave nothing at your back,
But slough all memories at every threshold;
Nor must you dream of opening any door
Until you have foreseen what lies beyond it.
Regardless of its seeming size, or what
May first impress you as its style or function,
The abrupt structure which involves you now
Will improvise like vapor. Groping down
The gritty cellar steps and past the fuse-box,
Brushing through sheeted lawn-chairs, you emerge
In some cathedral’s pillared crypt, and thence,
Your brow alight with carbide, pick your way
To the main shaft through drifts and rubbly tunnels.
Promptly the hoist, ascending toward the pit-head,
Rolls downward past your gaze a dinted rock-face
Peppered with hacks and drill-holes, which acquire
Insensibly the look of hieroglyphics.
Whether to surface now within the vast
Stone tent where Cheops lay secure, or take
The proffered shed of corrugated iron
Which gives at once upon a vacant barracks,
Is up to you. Need I, at this point, tell you
What to avoid? Avoid the pleasant room
Where someone, smiling to herself, has placed
A bowl of yellow freesias. Do not let
The thought of her in yellow, lithe and sleek
As lemonwood, mislead you where the curtains,
Romping like spinnakers which taste the wind,
Bellying out and lifting till the sill
Has shipped a drench of sunlight, then subsiding,
Both warm and cool the love-bed. Your concern
Is not to be detained by dread, or by
Such dear acceptances as would entail it,
But to pursue an ever-dimming course
Of pure transition, treading as in water
Past crumbling tufa, down cloacal halls
Of boarded-up hotels, through attics full
Of glassy taxidermy, moping on
Like a drugged fire-inspector. What you hope for
Is that at some point of the pointless journey,
Indoors or out, and when you least expect it,
Right in the middle of your stride, like that,
So neatly that you never feel a thing,
The kind assassin Sleep will draw a bead
And blow your brains out.

What, are you still awake?

Then you must risk another tack and footing.
Forget what I have said. Open your eyes
To the good blackness not of your room alone
But of the sky you trust is over it,
Whose stars, though foundering in the time to come,
Bequeath us constantly a jetsam beauty.
Now with your knuckles rub your eyelids, seeing
The phosphenes caper like St. Elmo's fire,
And let your head heel over on the pillow
Like a flung skiff on wild Gennesaret.
Let all things storm your thought with the moiled flocking
Of startled rookeries, or flak in air,
Or blossom-fall, and out of that come striding
In the strong dream by which you have been chosen.
Are you upon the roads again? If so,
Be led past honeyed meadows which might tempt
A wolf to graze, and groves which are not you
But answer to your supplier self, that nature
Able to bear the thrush's quirky glee
In stands of chuted light, yet praise as well,
All leaves aside, the barren bark of winter.
When, as you may, you find yourself approaching

RICHARD WILBUR
A crossroads and its laden gallows tree,
Do not with hooded eyes allow the shadow
Of a man moored in air to bruise your forehead,
But lift your gaze and stare your brother down,
Though the swart crows have pecked his sockets hollow.
As for what turn your travels then will take,
I cannot guess. Long errantry perhaps
Will arm you to be gentle, or the claws
Of nightmare flap you pathless God knows where,
As the crow flies, to meet your dearest horror.
Still, if you are in luck, you may be granted,
As, inland, one can sometimes smell the sea,
A moment's perfect carelessness, in which
To stumble a few steps and sink to sleep
In the same clearing where, in the old story,
A holy man discovered Vishnu sleeping,
Wrapped in his maya, dreaming by a pool
On whose calm face all images whatever
Lay clear, unfathomed, taken as they came.
“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 nebulos 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
lazily 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 new 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 ća du de diez, ć1 giv je dis," he said.
FROM THEN ON

I dreamed that I was doing what I was—
lying on my back in bed beside her,
and across the foot of it
there was an edge of light from the bathroom,
and out the closed plate window
it was almost black except for something
dim behind the great pinetrees on the ridge,
a storm was coming, it
was breathless in the ceiling the way it is
when the atoms in a chair move,
and sudden there was a wasp outside the window and I got up
in the dream and it was in the room and the lightbulb
in the bathroom hung from a wire and a long hair
grew down from it and I grabbed it but more hair
came out and I tried to tear it
to the black turn of the stairs below me...
and I was awake then, her hand
was asking what was wrong with my mouth,
and the storm was still coming, and the light
was still on in the bathroom, and I was wet
in every hair and could not stop shaking.

COMMENTARY

I don’t remember my dreams; they’re such an exclusive and absorbing country, they
make the country of wake-up hard to enter and function in, and one must get up.
But the dream that “From Then On” is about was so terrifying I couldn’t and haven’t
forgotten it. At first I couldn’t write about it; a few years later, though, I tried to. I was
so desperate to evoke it, my first version was laced with comment, especially at the
end. The first thing I saw was that the tone of the dream—what made it so real (a sort
of yellow-grey somewhere between a smell and a texture)—wouldn’t come over
into words. The second thing I saw was that if I junked the comment and kept to the
physical details (even left some of them out) of the dream and the sudden waking,
I’d get as close as I could to the tone, and if I used a run-on or breathtaking rhythm...
and syntax, I'd convey how it felt to have all that adrenalin loose in me during and just after the dream: in short, I went for the fear if not its special tone. The last thing I saw, even in the final version, was that the incredible seriousness one experiences in a dream turns comic when one relates the dream. I suspect that a dream—especially a powerful one—is the poem that memory on some irreducible level of frustration makes in the body when the power of choice and discrimination goes to sleep. In such a "poem," the "voice" often runs without moving or twits frustration by flying—some form of these. So every waking poem about that other "poem" is a species of literary history, funny because it pretends to be the poem it reports. I have to admit that "From Then On" feels like an actor visiting the studio where thirty years ago he starred in a monster movie. Those who don't like such movies are embarrassed by his old costume, while those who are addicted to them say, if he's lucky, "It's almost funny, but he does mimic himself pretty well."

Wanda Coleman

DREAM 27

"i do not like this coming of the white man," the old red chief spoke to me anguish in his braids and blankets. "he takes our women and leaves half-caste babies." i followed his line of vision, encompassed the town, mesas, the dazzle warmth of sun and sand. "remember this place well. you will come here ten years from now. the white man will have it all. i will be dead." i wondered why he said these things to me. how did i figure in the fate of his town? i watched as a beautiful laughing indian girl ran passed pursued by a young blond boy. i turned to the mirror/my cocoa face, there was something stuck in my mouth.
ELEGY FOR A PFC

Summoned in a dream,
I sought my brother in the earth,
falling through ancient graves
to the beginning of Spring.
I ran through hanging roots,
through reliquaries,
until I found
my brother in the earth,
his face upturned to Summer.
Youth had frozen on his lips,
his voice was lost in wounds.
Though I implored him to speak,
he was silent as a tree.
Though I beat my life upon him,
he was rigid as The Cross.

Then peace as brief as twilight
broke in war again.
The wind blew red.
Bombs tore out his heart and head,
so mingling him with roots
wounds
were lost in them.

I screamed in terror,
"Jesus, stop this war!"
But Christ, rising upward,
was silent as a leaf.
COLOR OF A BRUISE

Half awake, I twitch
In other half of sleep.
In the dream I am sunrise
on a yellow bed,
a knife for slitting
pillows
in my hand.
I stab and stab.
The room rains
yellow feathers.
Everything is yellow
except
the teeth in my head.
Blue
growing out of my scalp.
Blue
all of them
all of them
blue.

Suddenly
a dentist appears,
his yellow heart thumping.
He carries a yellow drill.
I scream, “No! It’s time
to shop for lemons.”
In the Supermarket
the teeth in my head
grow wild as tusks.
The dentist impales himself.
Pain flows into yellow,
yellow blends with blue.

I am the bruise of myself.
FLOWER DREAMS

In Golden Gate Park
In San Francisco
I leaned over
To pick a flower
And found myself
Staring in the face
Of a part-time policeman
Part-time gardener

I tried to ignore him
Concentrated on the flower
Which was nearly as tall as I
And reached out toward the sky

I leaned further over
To sever its roots
Found myself attacked
From all sides
Lost one ear
One eye
My nose
Part of my scalp
And nearly all my sense

I struck back bravely
Sought the aid of the gardener
Who smiled with evil intentions
As he handed me his shears
And leaned over to watch
Me take the flower's life

I took the gardener's instead.
Kathleen Fraser

COMMENTARY

THE DREAM RE-MEMBERS THE POEM


I had been looking at the paintings of Rene Magritte for years. Frank O'Hara, New York poet and then curator of the Museum of Modern Art, had first introduced me to Magritte's work by taking me to a large retrospective at the museum in the mid-'60s. Early in 1972, I purchased the Ballantine paperback issue of forty of Magritte's paintings and began looking, again, closely at his work. I had a powerful and unique encounter with one painting in which I seemed to enter the image, to leave the confines of my immediate experience (which, at that particular time, felt inarticulate and soggy with pain) and to become the image, to take on the body of the image, as mine. I felt spoken for. Identified. Acknowledged. That painting was called "Collective Invention." It showed a reverse mermaid, top half fish, bottom half female torso, lying on sand, next to waves, unable to swim or walk.

Three years later, a student and friend of mine, knowing of my interest in Magritte, gave me the larger and splendid collection of his works published by Abrams. Again, I began looking. But this time my intention was to actively collaborate with Magritte's sensibility—his images, his acute sense of displacement, his dream-like insistence upon mysterious and absurd relationships, a haunting coded world that spoke deeply to my unconscious. I wanted to write a series of poems in which this real dream-world was addressed. I would determine the order and choice of poem subject by leafing through the paintings until one moved out to me. I would then note its title (for the words were very important to Magritte; he was literary as well as painterly). The book would often remain open at that painting for days, and I would go about my life, now and again looking at it and noting the title. Usually within two weeks, some thought or event would set off the poem that was to enter into dialogue with this particular painting.

The painting entitled "Not to be Reproduced" pictures the back view of a man in a black, formal suit looking into a large, severely framed mirror, above a mantle. The mirror-image, which one would expect to show his face, again repeats the back view so that one is immediately struck by the secrecy, the withholding of full identity by this man. There is a note of vulnerability suggested by light falling on the left side of his hair and neck and along the merest edge of white shirt showing above the black suit coat.

I had been looking at this painting for a week or so when I suddenly thought that I wanted to write about secretive men and the fascination they held for me, to
try to pursue the mystery that hooked me in, again and again, to that fatal attraction. As I began writing, I decided to let go of the usual linear construction of the poem and work, instead, in a prose poem form so as to allow a more philosophic or narrative investigation...a different kind of space to stretch out in. I was, at that time, in a relationship with a philosopher-logician, whose particular secretiveness took a very complex form, and it was with this man’s sensibility that I began wrestling in the poem.

However, once I had proposed my first set of images and speculations, I came to this statement: “The secrets between men and women are of peculiar fascination” and immediately thought of a dream I’d had of my father, a year earlier. I rushed to my journals, found the dream and felt instinctively and absolutely that it was the next event to record in this poem I was writing. In this dream, my father was preparing to die but I couldn’t see that there was anything wrong with him and I became determined to convince him of the value of his life. In the dream I asked him to take off his clothes, i.e., to remove his black suit, his formality, his secrecy, his death robe. I asked him, essentially, to show himself to me, to trust me with what he’d been hiding. But I didn’t understand this at the time. I hadn’t analyzed the dream, but simply recorded it. The command from the unconscious to re-member the dream by finding it and giving it new life inside the poem, was a gift which would not have been given had I not first entered into the attitude of attention, the act of writing, composing, re-membering my feelings around secrets.

The second gift given during the act of writing the poem came when I wanted to locate the reality of my father’s death, which had come suddenly, ten years before, when he was killed in a car crash. As I began recording the concrete details of his death, my memory provided an image in the way that a dream does or a Magritte painting does, pulling it out from the thousands of details one stores up in ten years of life. I remembered that when asked if there was anything of my father’s that I wanted, I asked for his architect’s drawing tools. As I recorded this, I suddenly understood the meaning of those tools and was able to bring the poem to its finish, to its discovery.

This was all done without any analysis or intellectual plaiting of materials. The information came as swiftly and surely as a dream. I knew its placement was right. But it was not until months later that I understood an even deeper level of meaning for my own life. I had been struggling, during that period, to come into contact with the more aggressive or male aspects of my psyche (what Jung called the animus), which I’d felt frightened of and uneasy with. I had been working in a public job where a great deal of leadership, decision-making, assertiveness had been required. I was not easy with it and felt isolated from a wholeness-of-self because I couldn’t accept those parts of myself which I’d been able to successfully engage. As a result, I’d been experiencing a lessening of joy and energy, a kind of slow psychic dying. When I looked back at the poem, I realized that my father’s unclothed body which was ruddy and glowing was also representing this male part of him in me, the healthy animus which wanted to live, in spite of its wariness around being public. And that the only way I could achieve this integration of parts was through the active engagement with my writing—my creative process. That having the tools was of no use unless there were hands to hold and direct those tools.

In the writing process, I could take the logical skills my father had given me, the structural formal principles and the confidence needed to assert one’s own vision in the world, and combine those qualities or “tools” with my own more intuitive, feeling and visual/imagistic gifts and make a third form of life—the poem.

But without the gift of the dream and the dream-like perception of Magritte’s images and my willingness to attend and trust the exactness of both, there would have been no poem, no next step in my own psychic growth.
LA REPRODUCTION INTERDITE/
NOT TO BE REPRODUCED

For Dick

I am interested in the logic of secrets, how it has always moved me, in particular, to be invited by a face into the aura of its withholding, as though we were designed to bring forward two opposing sets of facts and bathe ourselves in the resulting struggle, as in watching a tightrope walker move from one point in space to another, each foot brought precisely from behind and placed in front of the other, but without the delicious possibility of falling, were it not for the rope stretched tautly beneath him, cutting the air with its odor of hemp.

The secrets between men and women are of peculiar fascination. My father, for example, invited me into a dream last summer where I discovered that he was making preparations to die. He was busy doing small errands, rushing about in his impeccably tailored suit and polished shoes, with a face so sad, so preoccupied with its secret, so designed to escape observation that I immediately began to pay attention, invited as I was by that closed-off expression to become the rope upon which he demonstrated his journey.

As I watched him moving to get everything in order before leaving, my sense of dismay began to take on its own life, expanding into anger and then curiosity. "How does he know?" I asked my mother. The fibers in me were twisting and vibrating. A conviction was growing, I became filled with the possibility of his life continuing and decided to speak to him directly, hoping to convince him that his death need not be imminent.

I go to my father and I say "Why do you think you are going to die?" His feeling is more one of resignation or tiredness than any specific illness. I ask him matter-of-factly to take off his clothes so that I may look at his body. He does so and his body appears to be fine, a bit shorter and stockier than I remember, but ruddy and glowing. I see immediately that he is perfectly well and able to live for a very long time. I tell him with conviction and energy that there is no reason for him to continue on this course of dying, that he is wholly alive and has many things to do. As I tell him this, we are walking outside through a woods, now up a slight incline to a clearing. My father seems very joyous and happy to hear the news. He accepts it, but with a kind of privacy that he's always had, savoring it for himself, indicating that he hopes I won't make a public issue of it. There is a kind of charged excitement between us, a flirtation with the possibilities that now lie ahead.

In 1965, my father was hit by a car and pronounced dead. I asked for his first set of architect's drawing tools, wrapped in a chamois case he'd sewn himself, each metal pencil and compass enclosed in its own soft pocket, each a potential source of precision and invention, given a hand to hold it.
FEVER DREAM ON THE EVE OF ILLNESS

A tower of flesh how tall it was
a honeycomb of light how tremulous it was
sheltering centipedes and basilisks
dragonflies bagworms skeletal cranes
creatures too small to be digested

‘Without your blood’s heat and the moist
caverns of your soul they would die:
they are your Self’s selves, your illness’
what a terror it is

what a Christmas Eve

COMMENTARY

Before coming down with a prolonged illness, a form of flu, I was instructed in a
dream that my body had the function of a kind of tall, warm building, a tower of
flesh, that protected innumerable tiny creatures from the killing cold of the universe.
My “sickness” was in fact their survival and nourishment. Though the dream did not
alleviate the symptoms of the illness, it put me in a curiously tranquil, philosophical
state of mind which is sometimes still available to me if I summon it back.
I make no distinction between dream and reality. Life is a metaphor. This is a poem about the life/dream that is narcotics.

FALL OMENS

This fall I am swollen
with mutant promise,
a prophecy burning obscene
in my mouth like a black worm
or terrible charm.
It is as the omens specified!
Earthquakes and mysterious illness.
Government trucks bring gauze
and gas masks.

I want to feel the sea-breeze sting
without the elaboration of coats.
I leave doors unlocked.
Floors fill with torn newspapers
and trails from ant hills.
Stray cats come
with their poor starved litters.
We shiver while wind
rips the ribs of the house.

No secret hollows exist
in the derelict underbelly
of this wounded city
with its odd grace and ruin.
Soon rooms will be lit
only by fires
from wind-split power lines.
The rations thin.
The pipes grind dry.

The bleached sky is taut
and empty as a mirror obsessively
watching the same white wall.
One small bird beats the wind.
More birds skim the white caps.
Birds blue and gray and black
with oil and dust and city soot.
These are the birds of prophecy
and plague.

The sky is cloudless, lacking depth.
The birds are their own dimension.
A leaderless unmatched flock
with carrion enough
in this dullest slate of fall
where waves coil hopeless
at the contagious shore,
the pitted roads and gray hills
punched by shrill wind.

The circle is pulled smaller.
The wind tires.
The warm birds go.
The broken things touch
bottom, finite.
The sea spits one last
blind fish,
pronged spines useless
for hunting or mating.

The survivors drift
into pale white morning
reflected in oily puddles
off ruts in deserted alleys.
The last cables fall.
Pneumonia startles.
Bodies lie unburied.
There is not ground enough.
CATCH ME SOMEONE

Catch me someone
I've just jumped
from the fiftieth story.

I sleep with a weapon
in one hand
and a wound
in the other.

All night I take deep breaths,
lock my stomach muscles
and suck the dark world in.
Then I pat my secret pocket
and feel my death as solid
as my father's fourteen carat watch.

Years rush up to meet me.
Friends call from upper storeys.
I plunge past men
with eyes turned inward,
women self-contained as cactus,
children sticky with alphabet parings.

There's just time enough to shout,
"This will be a hard act to follow."

THE JUNGLE

After slashing through the jungle
full of savage summer
where animals lie sick
with heat, even hunters
too overcome to drag
trophies home, we'll dream
cool vegetable mornings through
the scorched night, corn springing
from the navel of Osiris,
the Nile emptying drop by drop into a glass of milk.
IN 1935 WHEN THINGS GOT TOUGH

"The nature of the enemy is
the ritual they sell......."
Carol Berge

The door is open
braced
by a bare wall.
Morning message
sunlit issued.
Dirt
condensed window
broke open inch high
wide and deep.
The white wall
bears perfect
witness: 10 inch
circumference.
A DOOR IS OPEN.

An immense stairway, infinite
and accessible.
One placid and breathless
contact of pavement.

IN 1935 WHEN THINGS GOT TOUGH
THEY SANG AND DANCED A LOT.

Footlight Parade
    beneath the kicking legs
of Deus Ex Machina beauties.
    Women of the pretense postcard
behind an impenetrable country
    where nothing from the outside
can get in, nothing
that can penetrate
into the heart of that peace: its
beautiful airy night and starless
    sky.
Not even the childish idiots who
    buy it all
who inquire about the hill next door
    while
the sudsing alliances cascade
    over the kitchen sink.
Then, Oh boy, that bounce
    which explodes consciousness
    to kingdom-come.
And gone, the spiral-hearted sweethearts, the
    banana fringe
calling for sale, to buy
the best the big-nosed eye has got; to
    better the soul with
    clean image.
Leave it to the neighborly nexus
    to suck it all back, to begin
the bargain from scratch. The Gross Naturale
    figuring the percentage, fingering
    the count with ritual.

The circle grows larger
    out into the street, sidewalks
of inexhaustible content which hold in it
    infinite rays of light and swallow
all the multiplicities there are
    in the world.
Men of the sidewalk moved by mistake, a Mecca rough-tough
doing the fantasy, rat-a-tat tyrants
specializing in the push and shove
mugging the market
with brass knuckle metaphysics.
The wind picks their face.
They lurch into the winestink
of fellow travellers, addictive
tellers to the time-toting scheme
of have-nots: someone
whose mercy is a window stump, scarcity
psychosis
dribbling from the mouth.
MISSION STATION, THE TRUE CHURCH.
BEHOLD, JESUS
COME QUICKLY.

And the passersby who run for it, the
next door neuters, the motorcycle
minions, the spare change idolaters, the
punks for peace, the downtown leeches
who stand on corners and leer; the ones
who have no names.
They all grab for space, from
the nearest dirty sidewalk away
from splashdown.
It splatters
and sends them all reeling.
Except these men moved by mistake
continue on, suddenly turn, settle
their position Northeast corner and
shed their movement.

IN 1935 WHEN THINGS GOT TOUGH

A DOOR IS OPEN

THERE IS NO VOICE.
THERE IS NO IMAGE
THERE IS NO VISION
POEM

This is my period of sexual meditation

gravity is the way distant objects touch each other

how endlessly shocked they would be at the idea of sex

I am endlessly shocked at the idea of sex like the
falling man who loses the sensation and then depth startles him

the story has a hundred morals but the only exit is a change of mood

and Bob loves the pleasure he takes in receiving sensation,
when he woke up slowly to a blow job the radio clung to sleep
but its tubes grew redder

he retains it
like the taste of an erotic dream, describe the dream:

a cave where the tides live
two men twist up and up, light gleams off in a rapture
they squeeze liquid from their wet torsos
the deep mystery of the heavenly men

the best looking says, I like men,

any orifice could be a mouth, in bed everything that’s
not me is you, I like earth men,

they are always surprised by sex, interest lights up their eyes,
the most jaded, innocent as a prisoner, turns his head in wonder.

A situation starets Bob in the eyes as he approaches and
continues staring into his eyes through the back of his head
If my mind’s touched I’m totally touched

Bob says We might as well go all the way

Ed says I love conclusions, when I come I get
a heart attack a stroke and four flat tires

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Bob says By any chance do you know basic syncopation?

Ed says A man was embraced and embraced

Bob says New hope to my hands

Ed's forehead wrinkles to understand
he says, the empty whiteness moves down the stairs,
the blind panther, a room appears as he enters it

Then Bob shared the surprise of
people who become what they don't expect

then we take a shower where I love to drink water off his skin
Holly Prado

DREAM REPORT

A DREAM IN APRIL WHEN WE ALL DISCOVER SPRING

a cramped room: the chairs are the folding chairs from a cheap wedding or a 1940's piano recital. I'm older than the others who are here for a poetry reading. I carry my folder of poems as if I carry a lifetime of work they haven't done yet. I grumble, wanting a better audience.

one young woman asks me to find the bathroom with her, so we walk through this clattery building, looking for it. she's as blond as my own enthusiasm when I started to write. she asks me how to finish a poem in which the poet uses different versions of one idea. she uses the word "stretch," spreading her arms to mean stretching an image to give it as many meanings as possible. I feel her behind me in this narrow hallway, hovering and waiting, her hands apart.

what can ever be explained? yet, suddenly, her question excites me. the perfect answer gathers in my throat. I turn to her. I rattle my hands on her shoulders as if I can shake her into understanding. I shout, "the end of that kind of poem becomes what you've learned in the process of writing the poem itself!" I laugh. I've been holding this answer in me for a long time, but have never been able to push it into the air before. I notice that I don't have my folder of poems with me. I don't have my typewriter. I don't have my list of publications.

then I'm in a cave full of orange-red pillars: it's my creative world. the pillars shimmer from fiery passion to gentle crooning. they may be ancient dalisk or long bolts of fabric. I haven't seen this place before, but I'm showing a man through it. I know he cares for me, though he's a stranger. he guides me, silently, in the same way I lead him. we move and stare. I haven't realized the extensiveness of this creative belly that's so special, so glowing, so full of interstices and folds and cannies and shifting colors and possibilities. I make all the promises again.
INTERWEAVINGS: REFLECTIONS ON THE ROLE OF DREAM IN THE MAKING OF POEMS

Can I distinguish between dreaming and writing—that is, between dream images and those which come into being while I am in the poem-making state? I'm not sure.

I began writing at a very early age, but the two childhood dreams I remember were beyond my powers to articulate. One of them was a kind of nightmare; and after it had recurred a couple of times I found I could summon it at will—which I did, in much the same spirit, I suppose, as that in which people watch horror movies. Retrospectively, I see it as a mythic vision of Eden and the Fall: the scene is a barn, wooden and pleasantly—not scarily—dark, in which the golden hay and straw are illumined by a glow as of candlelight. And all around the room of the barn are seated various animals—cows, sheep, horses, dogs, and cats. They all sit somewhat the way dogs do, with their front legs straight and their back ones curved to one side, and they look comfortable, relaxed. There's an atmosphere of great peace and wellbeing and camaraderie. But suddenly—without a minute's transition—all is changed: all blackens, crinkles, and corrugates like burnt paper. There's a sense of horror.

I was not more than six when I first dreamed this, and it frightens me still; can it (I think to myself) have been a prophetic dream about the nuclear holocaust we live our lives in fear of? Then I console myself a bit with the knowledge that it didn't have to be so; I'd already long since been terrified several times by the sight of the newspaper my mother, with astounding rashness, would wrap around the metal-mesh fireguard to make the new-lit coals draw, catching on fire, the charred tatters of it flying up the chimney like flimsy bats. Someone had accidentally dropped a sheet of newspaper over my face when I was in the cradle and apparently I went into convulsions from the fright of it. I seem to remember it, in fact, though I was only a few months old; and this connected itself to the way a page of the Times would burst into a sheet of flame and so quickly blacken. In my dream there were no flames, only the switch from the soft glow in which all the friendly beasts (and I among them) basked and were at peace, to the horror of irreversible destruction, of ruin.

The other dream came when I was eight. I used as a child to love reading the descriptions (often accompanied by small photographs) of country houses for sale which at that time occupied the back page of the London Times. They ranged from cottages to castles, and I was not only fascinated by their varied architecture but also by their names. I would furnish each with inhabitants and make up "pretend games" (long, mainly unwritten serial stories within which I moved not so much doing anything as being one of the people in them—another form of dreaming). Another source of these daydreams was the sample notepaper, embossed or printed with the names of persons or places I presume were made up by the stationer, which my
father, as a clergyman, used to receive from time to time. He would give me these
advertisements to play with; and from a letterhead such as

Colonel & Mrs. Ashley Fiennes
The Manor House
Rowanbeck,
Westmoreland

I could create not the plot of a story—I’ve never been good at that—but a situation
and its shadowy children. So—this dream was of a house. When I first dreamed it
there were some scenes, events, something of a story or situation in the dream; but
those soon faded, and what I remembered (and now still either remember, or
remember remembering, so that the picture still has clarity) was the vision of the
house itself. It is seen from a hillside perhaps a quarter of a mile away, and it’s a
Jacobean house with two projecting wings. The stone it’s made of is a most lovely
warm peach-pink; and the English county it’s in is Somerset—lovely name! The
mood or atmosphere of this dream is as harmonious and delightful as that of the
barn, but this time there’s no disaster; it just goes on glowing, beaming, filling the self
who gazes from the hillside with ineffable pleasure. Not long ago I realized that the
reason I always give my present address as West Somerville, which though correct is
not necessary for postal purposes, is not from some snobbish concern (East
Somerville, like East Cambridge, is a poorer, uglier neighborhood) but because
Somerville sounds like Somerset and Somerset is in the West Country. The
associations are pleasant; when I say “West Somerville” I evoke for myself the old
rose color of the house in my dream, though plain “Somerville” makes me think of
Union Square and its traffic jams. The house of the dream had a name too:
Mazinger Hall; and I dreamed it on a Midsummer’s Eve. For many years just to think
of it could give me a sense of peace and satisfaction. What connection do these two
early dreams, which never became poems, have with the images of poetry or with
my later activity as a writer? The powerful first one perhaps embodies some basic
later themes, of joy and fear, joy and loss. But it’s the second one, because of its
verbal element—the house having a name and an awareness of the sounds and
associations of Somerset, West Country, being implicit—that links itself to the
writing of poems.

Although my first book, The Double Image, is full of the words dream and
dreamer, it is daydreaming and the idea of dreaming that really prevail in it. It was
some years later that I began to write directly from real dreams; “The Girlhood of
Jane Harrison,” for instance. I had been reading J. H.’s Prolegomena to the Study
of Greek Religion and some of her other work, but had not then read her charming
autobiographical memoir, later given me by Adrienne Rich because I’d written the
poem. My dream is described in the poem, but I don’t know that the sense, in the
dream and in the wake of it, of the symbolic value of the window, indoor and garden
darknesses, the sweetness of marzipan, the naming of roses, the diagram (“like the
pan for starcake”) of the dance in which Jane Harrison and her semblances moved
from the central point out towards and beyond the dissolving boundaries of youth’s
garden, is adequately presented in the text. “Marzipan” is an especially unrealized
reference; I myself can only dimly recall what part it played in the dream, and I don’t
see how anyone else could derive its significance from the poem unaided by any
trace of memory. I think it was a word that the figure in the dream murmurs to
herself as if its sound and the sweetness and dense texture of the substance so
named expressed the feeling of the summer night and its roses. Also it was linked
with the “star cake.” The garden was a nineteenth century English one, with ample
lawns and rosebeds, the surrounding shrubbery backed by taller trees, and a great
cedar in the middle distance. Jane leans out of a groundfloor window at first; then
she steps into the outdoor space. Though it’s dark there’s some moonlight, or
possibly a glow from the house behind her—enough for trees and bushes to cast
shadow. Starting from near the cedar, she begins to dance; and in forming the star
figure of the dance, which is a ritual to welcome the autumn that is soon to begin, she
multiplies, as if reflected in many mirrors or as if a cluster of identical dancers spread
out to the points of a compass rose. She’s moved out of the house of childhood,
recognized the end of summer, saluted the fall (The Fall from innocence into the
vast adventure of Knowledge?) to which her own grown-up life corresponds.
Something like that. But as a poem it may be incompletely evolved, or partially
unborn. And this is the great danger of dream poems: that they remain subjective,
private, inaccessible without the author’s gloss. Not only dream material presents
this danger, of course; one of the most typical failures of student poetry is the writer’s
failure to recognize what has actually emerged into the poem and what remains
available only to the poet or through explications that are not incorporated in the
work. Such non-articulated material may originate in all kinds of experience; but
dream experiences are particularly likely to be insufficiently transmuted into art
unless the writer is sensitive to the problem and to its solution.

“Relative Figures Reappear” is another dream-poem I seldom read to
audiences. I feel it describes a dream but does not evoke it vividly enough for it to stir
in others feelings analogous to those it gave to me; and because of this descriptive,
rather than evocative, quality its significances remain unshared in much the same
way as those in the Jane Harrison poem, “The Park,” on the other hand, in which
persons and places of my own life also appear, seems somewhat more evocative—
its images have more feeling-tone—and ends with a rather clear statement of intent,
specifying the park as the

country of open secrets where the elm
shelters the construction of gods
and true magic exceeds all design.

The dream (and I hope, the poem) gave a sense of the way in which “real magic”
may be arrived at by means of illusive modes; or rather that it transcends the trickery
or sleight-of-hand it may condescend to utilize. The elm (real, natural, an “open
secret”) may indeed shelter the construction, by carpenters, of wooden “gods”—but
they are real gods! Magic is happening, a multi-layered paradox.

Many of my poems of the fifties and early sixties—“Nice House,” “Scenes
from the Life of the Pepper Trees,” “The Springtime,” “The Departure,” for
example—may seem to have been dream-derived, but they were not. Rather they
are typical examples of the poetic imagination’s way of throwing off analogues as it
moves through, or plays over, the writer’s life. I see a difference between these
poems and those of a still earlier period, however: being more concrete and more
genuinely related as analogies, metaphors, images, to that life-experience—more
rooted, in a word—they are truly poems in a degree that the stanzas of vague
talk, unfounded either in actual dreams or in daily waking life, which filled The
Double Image, were not. One poem from the early sixties which might easily be
mistaken for dream account is “A Happening,” a metaphor that expressed for
me the trauma of returning to the city after two years in Mexico, proved to be
meaningful to many readers. For me it was New York City that was the intractably
alien and terrifying place, despite years of residence there and attempts to love it; for
others it may have been any other great metropolis. However, the poem includes a
conscious irony that I now think is a flaw because of its peculiar obscurity: one of the
protagonists (a stranger bird who turns into a paper sack and then “resumes its
human shape” when it touches down in the streets of the city) goes uptown to seek

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the source of “the Broadway river.” Now, only someone familiar with New York would know, first, that Broadway does have a river-like meandering course, and second, that in fact it begins downtown, where Manhattan’s earliest buildings were constructed near the harbor. So the stranger is looking in the wrong direction. That’s part of the “plot” of the poem, but it’s not fully accessible, and even to a New Yorker can too easily seem merely a mistake on the part of a writer who was, at the time, a fairly recent immigrant. (I had come to the U.S. at the end of 1949, but had spent almost four years out of the country during the fifties.)

In dreams, of course, just such “mistakes” do occur; but the dream atmosphere of a poem must be as strongly convincing as a Magritte painting to ensure the reader’s not being distracted by its peculiarities from the dynamics of the poem itself. When the images of certain poems (dream derived or not) make one feel one is entering a real dream, it is a sign of their strength, their power. We are convinced, just as, ourselves dreaming, we accept without question situations and juxtapositions our waking reason finds illogical or “weird.” Poems “about” dreams which are not well written are as boring or depressing as other shoddy work; and poems which (like my own early work) make constant reference to the dream state but provide no concrete evidence of its existence are at best vaguely pleasant in a melancholy, misty way. When a poem “feels like a dream” it does so by virtue of the clearness of its terms (however irrational they may be). When we wake from actual dreams, isn’t it precisely the powerful clarity, not any so-called “dreaminess,” that speaks to us? It is true that sometimes dream episodes, and figures in them, dissolve or melt into one another and that this witnessed metamorphic process forms part of the dream-drama; but we are not commonly brought to question it while dreaming, any more than we question the transitions of place, mood, and persons we experience while waking.

In the early sixties my husband began working with a Jungian therapist who encouraged him to talk over his dreams with me; and this stimulated me to remember and think about many more of my own dreams than hitherto, both because of our discussions and his account of the therapist’s interpretations and because I began to make a practice of writing down what I remembered, and of participating to some extent in the emotional effect of Mitch’s dreams as well as my own. Thus, in “A Ring of Changes,” I wrote,

I look among your papers
for something that will give you to me
until you come back;
and find: “Where are my dreams?”

Your dreams! Have they not nourished my life?
Didn’t I poach among them, as now on your desk?
My cheeks grown red and my hair curly
as I roasted your pheasants by my night fire!

My dreams are gone off to hunt yours,
I won’t take them back unless they find yours,
they must return torn by your forests...

It was a time of great pain and a lot of growth for us; looking back I see that the sharing of our dream-life, and of what we were learning about how to think about dreams, was what kept us going and held us to one another in those years more than anything else. Whatever conflicts we endured, we nevertheless found ourselves linked in the unconscious; not that, as some have done, we dreamed the same dream or answered dream with dream: yet our common intense interest in our own and each other’s nightly adventures in the inner world acted as a powerful bond. After a while I too began to see a therapist and to work more methodically in trying to comprehend the symbolic language. Specifically dream-originated poems of this
time are part IV of “A Ring of Changes,” “The Dog of Art,” the prose story about Antonio and Sabrinus (A Dream)” and To the Snake,\(^8\) as well as some of those previously mentioned: but not The Goddess,\(^9\) though people have thought so. The daisy-eyes, worked in wool, of the Dog of Art are the “lazy-daisy” embroidered eyes my mother (and later I, myself, when my son was little) used to substitute for the dangerous button-eyes on wire pins with which stuffed toy animals used to be furnished. The dream-images, and consequently the poem, imply relationships between the embroiderer’s practical creative imagination and the child’s imagination that infuses still more life into the toy; the functioning of imagination in dream, and the way it incorporates memory; and the way in which artists (of any kind) draw upon all of these things. Daisies suggest the “innocent eye” of art.

Something the Antonio and Sabrinus dream made even clearer for me than it had been before was the urgent tendency of some material toward its medium—in this case prose, not verse. I began telling the story as a poem, but it had been a dream with a very distinct tone or style, a tale told; and the slightly arcaic diction which was virtually “given,” or at least which the dream lay on the very brink of, sounded stifled in verse. (It was in conversation with Robert Bly that the possibility of capturing the tone better in prose rhythms emerged, I remember—unlikely as that seems, for Bly has never, in my opinion, really understood the sonic aspects of poetry, which is why, focusing almost exclusively on the image, he has felt free to translate such various poets. Had he been concerned with ear and voice he would have been haunted by auditory problems he has simply ignored.) The stanzas of verse which conclude “A Dream” began, I think, as the opening of the subsequently abandoned first version. I had a similar experience of material “wanting to be” prose in writing the non-dream experience of a tree-felling, the story “Say the Word.”\(^1\) One must learn to listen to the form-needs of events; and dream material often seems to make this necessity specially clear.

This retrospective evaluation of my own relation to dreams as a poet reveals so far two main points. One is the difficulty of adequately conveying not only the mood of the dream, and of not only describing or presenting its facts, but also—along with mood and facts combined—of capturing within the poem itself a sense of its significance. For the poem to work, this significance may be narrowly personal only if a sufficient context is provided for that personal meaning to justify itself as a dramatic component. For example, in “A Sequence”\(^12\) it is possible that the tense situation presented in the first four parts of the sequence provides a sufficiently novelistic context for the dream references of part five, tenuous though their meaning may be, to have some impact. One can at least comprehend that the dream joke (which, as often happens, doesn’t really seem all that funny when one wakes and looks for the point of it) does in fact give a crucial moment of relief to the protagonists. And perhaps this puts it on a less narrow, more universal level: one accepts the laughter and relief (I speak now as reader, not writer, for the poem was written so long ago) not because one shares the joke but because one has witnessed the characters’ previous misery, and also because one is probably familiar with the way in which such tension can at last be broken by something simply silly.

The other point revealed is that the attempt to render dream into poem is potentially an excellent way to learn one’s craft, for if the difficulties inherent in that process can be surmounted, those attendant upon the articulation of other experience seem less great. Moreover—and this perhaps is a third and separate point—consideration of dream-images, in which the imagination has free play, or at least less censored and inhibited play, than it has in the waking mind, provides valuable models of possibility for the too-deliberate, cautious, and thus “uninspired” writer. (Or perhaps I should say, for the writer temporarily in an uninspired, over-intentional phase; for if a poet’s sole experience of being taken over by the imagination took place in dreaming, could one consider him a poet at all?)

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There is a certain kind of dream in which it is not the visual and its associations which are paramount in impact and significance, but rather an actual verbal message, though a visual context and the identity of the speaker may be important factors. The first dream I can recall having written into a poem ("The Flight," Collected Earlier Poems 1940–1960, p. 34) was dreamed in London in 1945 but not composed until several years later, probably in New York. The encounter with William Blake—who was sitting on the floor, his back against a wall and his knees drawn up, and who looked at me with his prominent, unmistakable eyes as he spoke—was so memorable that the lapse of time has scarcely blurred it. And it coincided with the "real life" fact of a bird's getting caught in my room that night and at dawn, when I pushed down the top half of the sash window, shooting unhesitatingly out, calmed by the sleep into which it had sunk when I turned out the light. But it was the extraordinary Blakean words, "The will is given us that we may know the delights of surrender," that made the dream an artistic whole which seemed to ask only for transcription. Yet if I'd tried to write the poem at the time of dreaming I would not have had the craftsmanship to accomplish it, and it would have been lost to me, because once crystallized in an inadequate form, it would almost inevitably have become inaccessible to another attempt.

Then there are verbal dreams whose visual context vanishes on waking, or never appeared at all, the dream having consisted purely of words. The context may arrive later, in the world of external events. "In Memory of Boris Pasternak," exemplifies this latter eventuality. In its second section I wrote about the way in which a great writer can impart to scenes of one's own world a character they would not otherwise have had—in other words, can give one new or changed eyes to see through. While I was working on the poem, I looked at the barn and woods and clouds and buried the dead fledglings among wild strawberries, a dream I'd lost track of re-entered my consciousness, and though at the time, two nights before, I'd not associated it with the recently-dead poet, the lines a disembodied voice had spoken, "The artist must create himself or be born again," came clearly into the constellation of images and experiences clustered around my feeling for Pasternak, so that the dictum seemed not only directive but also a comment on how, for the poet, "self-creation" consists in attaining, in a lifetime's practice of the art, the ability to reveal the world, or a world, to others. The dream words are syntactically ambiguous; do they mean, "If the artist fails to give birth to himself (to his creative potential) he must undergo reincarnation until he does so"? Or is the syntax appositive, i.e., "The artist must create himself, or in other words, be born anew in each work of his art, as in Christian theology the New Adam takes the place of the Old"? As the dreamer, my sense is that both meanings are implicit. Indeed, this leads me to note one of the most important lessons a poet can learn from dreaming—namely, that just as in dreams we effortlessly receive, rather than force into being by a process of will, images and their significances, including double images and complimentary double meanings, so in writing (from dream or non-dream sources) the process is rather one of recognizing and absorbing the given than of willing something into existence. But this "given" is not the taken-for-granted reality of superficial, inattentive moving through life, but the often disregarded reality that lies just beyond or within it.

A dream that exemplifies the verbal message without visual or other sensuous context is this one, in which the following proposition was presented to the intellect (presumably in much the same way as solutions to mathematical problems have occurred to people during sleep):

"Trauerzucker = Zauberzucker"

The dream consisted of these equated German words (which meant "mournful sugar" and "magic sugar") and of the awareness (a) that (in the dream world) there exists a funeral rite in which lumps of sugar are distributed to guests at a wake, and
(b) that this was understood to signify "out of sorrow comes joy." Thus, a ritual of sorrow and death, in which sugar is handed out to sweeten the bitterness, turns out to have an intimate connection with or even to be identical with (as shown by the equal sign) the rituals of (favorable, "white," or "good") magic—so that (it was implied) the sugar cubes don't just alleviate, but transform the sorrow (into joy).

A curious point was that the word "trauer" was misspelled, so to speak, in this non-visual dream, as "trauber," a word that doesn't exist; however, the word "traube," meaning a bunch of grapes, does, so that "traubenzucker" would be "grape-sugar" (as in Trauben-saft, grape-juice).

Often a dream presents a ring from which to hang the latent questions of that moment in one's life. "The Broken Sandal"\textsuperscript{14} was such a one. As it states, I "dreamed the thong of my sandal broke." The questions that follow—from the most literally practical ones about how I'm going to walk on without it over sharp dirty stones, to the more abstract ones:

Where am I going?
Where am I going I can't go to now, unless hurting?
Where am I standing, if I'm to stand still now?

arise (gradually waking) from the initial event. The dream demanded of the dreamer that some basic life-questions be asked. That was its function. In becoming poem, the organic process begun in dream continued, statement and questions giving the poem its necessarily terse form; and the mode of the questions was provided by the dream's sandal-thong metaphor, so that "Where am I (is my life) going?" is given concrete context, a matter of bare feet, of hobbling, of hurting. Finally the dreamer-writer is brought to enquire the nature of the place that is the poem's present. This type of dream experience and poem experience is not hampered by the intrusion of the ego and its so often untransferable trappings, but translates seamlessly into the reader's own "I." I wish that happened oftener. Yet perhaps a poetry devoid of the peculiarities of a less universal experience might seem bland; an occasional such poem may have some degree of stark force precisely because it is unusually simple, whereas a whole book of such poems might make one suspect the author of deliberately aiming at universality in the manner of gurus and greeting-card rhymesters. The hope is always that, when autobiographical images occur in a poem, readers will respond with the same combination of empathy and of a recognition of their own equivalents with which they would receive a novel, a play, a film. For instance, in "Don't You Hear That Whistle Blowin..."\textsuperscript{15} the "Middle Door" and the personages named—Steve, Richard, Bo, Mitch—are unknown to the reader, but the theme of the poem is loss and change, and my hope is that the poem clearly expresses this and (because of the givens of the dream source) reinforce that theme with the folkloric, nostalgic associations of railroad trains.

There is a type of dream that, like the simple image of the broken sandal, virtually writes itself: the kind whose very terms are those of the myth or fairy tale. "The Well,"\textsuperscript{16} about which I've written elsewhere, is an instance. More recently the nature of a close relationship was dreamed in what felt like mythic terms, the resulting poem ("A Pilgrim Dreaming"\textsuperscript{17}) havings its rhythms and diction deriving partly from the feeling-tone of the dream itself and partly of my waking feelings—rather awestruck—about having dreamed something seemingly from my friend's point of view rather than my own, almost as if I had dreamed his dream. Again, one of the friends of whom I'd written twenty-five years before in "The Earthwoman and the Waterwoman"\textsuperscript{18} (not a dream-derived poem) was visiting me one day in 1978, and after she left I dreamed about her as "The Dragonfly Mother,"\textsuperscript{19} the long-ago images of water and blueness reappearing in a metamorphosis that expressed the growth and change in her and also in my response to her personality. Thus the sequence was, impression, first poem, passage of time, new impressions, dream,
second poem. And in addition (as recounted in the second poem) her visit affected my actions on that day, making me forego doing something I'd thought it was my duty to do (but which as a matter of fact wasn't important, since it was only a matter of speaking for two minutes at a big outdoor rally, at which I would not really be missed). Instead, I slept, dreamed, wrote a poem I like, and recognized how often the fear of displeasing masks itself as a sense of obligation.

Perhaps it is when dreaming and waking life thus interweave themselves actively that we experience both most intensely. When such interaction takes place for someone who is not an artist in any medium, the recognition of its power remains restricted to that individual. But the poet or other artist may sometimes experience the primary interweaving in the very doing of the poem, painting, dance, or whatever. It is then more than recapitulation, it is of one substance with the dream; and its power has a chance to extend beyond the limits of the artist's own life.

Appendix

Some dreams contain a great quantity of narrative detail than seems manageable in a poem. An example would be the following (which I can hardly believe occurred as long ago as 1963, it is so vivid to me: that is, its orientation—the placement of doors or rooms to the right or left in relation to the beholder—is so clear in my mind). I am visiting a mental hospital, or rather a residential clinic in search of a woman who works there in some more or less menial capacity, and whom I have agreed to help move into a new apartment. She is in fact moving into my building but I'd promised to assist her before I knew that, and she still doesn't know—I'm going to surprise her with the information later. I find that this place she works in is so interesting that I want to look at everything for its own sake. I more or less forget about looking for her, the people in her office know I'm doing so, anyway.

It's an old building without "grounds," right in the city, a mixture of City and Country School (a private elementary school in New York City) and the Judson Health Center (a neighborhood clinic in New York City). It works on the principle of keeping promises and of lots of creative occupational therapy. The O.T. rooms occupy almost all the space, unlike the situation in most hospitals. On a woman's floor I learn that troubled housewives can come for short periods (e.g., a week) and immerse themselves in doing painting or sculpture or whatever. On a door is a sign about "perpetual counsel"—I open it, not expecting to find anyone there during the lunch hour, but sure enough, there is: promise kept. Likewise on the children's floor is a door saying "The Friendly Lady" will be there at all times: and I look in, and she is.

Also on the children's floor is a special quiet library-room, quite small, rounded or vaulted in shape, in which there are four mural panels—silvery-white designs on milky-pale-blue background—of subjects "from the Zohar," showing constellations and kingly figures on horseback riding from, and composed of, stars; all prophetically tending towards the Stable of Bethlehem which can be seen afar as if amid the nebulae. A theme here is of reassurance—promises are kept, the "Friendly Lady" is actually there, "counsel" really is perpetual. There is a sense of consolation and grace akin to that in the idea of the Madonna, the Holy Mother. And the final scene, with the magical stary mural has its own evident symbolism, with powers and principalities moving towards the humble stable. (That the Zohar enters into this can be variously interpreted.)

Another dream "told itself" in the immediate writing down in what, with a little crafting, might approximate to the style of the Grimms' Household Tales. It's only an amusing anecdote, however: I enjoyed dreaming it but it could not impel me into trying to make a work of art of it. A little girl had longed, as many do (I did, passionately) for the inanimate to speak. To find one of her dolls actually addressing her one day! But as she grew older she of course became more and more aware it probably wouldn't happen. Then one day, when she was about ten years old, it did happen—though it was not a doll that spoke. This is what occurred: Her parents took two newspapers, one conservative, one radical, and the latter was lying on a couch or bed when, as she looked at it, it raised itself up on its elbow, so to speak, and began to address her. In delight and excitement she exclaimed, "How I've always wanted this to
happen!—And before, it never did, no matter how much I longed for it!! "Ah," said the newspaper (whose name was The Emancipator), "I'll tell you the secret of how to get us Things to speak—" And just then I woke up.

Yet another type of dream, verbal but not poetic, is illustrated by the following:

I am at Yale for a reading. A professor points out how many Black college Fellows (as the term is used at Oxford, or in Harvard's "Society of Fellows") are in the hall. I say, ironically, "Oh yes—angels on the point of a needle, right?"

The dream that follows suggests to me two literary possibilities: one would be, to re-enter the dream imaginatively and draw forth from it some further elements of story—this would tend to become prose fiction. The other possibility is that since the dream-experience becomes as much a part of one's memory-bank as any other, its images (rather than the fictional situation) may come into play unbidden in the course of some later poem. With another girl (Jean Rankin, my childhood friend) I come to the edge of the sea. (We are about eleven and twelve years old.) There seem to be shelves, or levels, of sea, and the whole expanse is cluttered with wrecked tankers, some floating, some half-beached, as far as the eye can see. It's a dark, dark-green, eerie seascape but the water's not cold and we have come to swim. We swim aboard the decks of the nearest wreck—stanchions and bits of companionway all awash and covered with eely seaweeds. We have fun swimming in and out of it all; we don't scrape or hit against anything. There is absolutely no living creature in sight and the shore is a vague sedgy marsh. After a long time, though, we realize that the boat is free of the bottom (and of the ridges or reefs of dark tufa-like rock) and has drifted out with the tide. We become troubled and decide to make our way (wading along the half-submerged decks to the end nearest land) back as far as we can without swimming, and then swim to shore before we get carried out any further. But even then it looks like a long swim—can we make it? Jean thinks we must; I am hesitant, thinking it might be better to risk staying on board the many hours till the next high tide washes us inshore again. We are perplexed—especially since it's so hard to judge the distance and the variable depth. Looking out to sea, the other levels stretch away and away, faintly gleaming, thick with wrecks. We might get wedged so that out particular wreck would not wash in with the next tide—or, half submerged as it was, it might sink, further out than we were already. On the other hand, the distance we were already out at sea looked greater than any we had ever tried to swim. No one to whom to signal. Woke in perplexity.

REFERENCES

2. Ibid. p. 127.
3. Ibid. p. 127.
4. Ibid. p. 69, p. 72., p. 82, p. 87.
5. Ibid. p. 97.
6. Ibid. p. 106.
7. Ibid. p. 118.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid. p. 131.
10. Ibid. p. 110.
13. Ibid. p. 32.
15. Freeing the Dust, New York: New Directions, 1975, p. 64.
20. A group of Jewish Cabalistic texts.
DREAMT TRIP

So, I am in Morocco with Paul Bowles
I have just arrived
and he gives me a set of Arab clothes
We go to a 'hanging gardens'
and he passes me his kit pipe
and when I awake there is only
a squishy waitress
in a fatima veil
Everyone gone from the dance floor
and I am without clothes 'lost
in the Zambezi'
of her smile
Many miles later
I find my long underwear
hung to dry on a
wooden rack
A tree grows from the crotch
and It is Spring
between her breasts

Lawrence Ferlinghetti
from PAPA DREAM BOOK
(1961)
My fiction and poetry are related to my dreams in several ways. Sometimes an entire story comes to me just before falling asleep, vivid and entire from start to finish. I used to write it down immediately, then try to work with it later only to find, in many cases, that there wasn’t quite enough there to make a finished product. So I would store the fragment in a file and wait for it to gel. The catalyst for the gelling process was often provided by another dream or pre-dream experience. Now I use a different method, allowing my unconscious, actually dreaming mind to make the important revisions. When a story or poem comes before I fall asleep, I don’t write it down. If it’s not there, I figure it wasn’t ready to emerge yet and will stay where it went until the time is right. I never regret losing it because I don’t believe it’s lost; over the years I’ve learned to trust my unconscious mind to work the story out more than I trust my conscious mind to contrive an ending or a plot that wasn’t there in the first place. And the first place is that moment of vision that comes in or around dreams, when the blinders of what we call waking consciousness are down or about to come down.

Another way, represented in “Down Under,” is the poem taken from the dream record. I’ve printed the record of the dream here to show how little I used of it in the poem. The dream occurred during a year spent in Bologna when my dreams were typically exotic and multilingual. Michele, referred to at the end, is a friend who visited me when I lived in Florence (a previous visit to Italy). The metallic purple poster came from the libretto of my choral symphony, In Praise of Love (premiered at Lincoln Center in 1974); I hated the way the librettos looked, including the metallic color. The Australian writer Machax is a punned version of Machaut, the medieval French vision poet whose work I know because it influenced Chaucer’s Booke of the Duchesse, one of my favorite dream poems. But the joyousness of the dream was the guiding force in stripping away all the parts of it I didn’t need for the poem. The poem itself is from a series I call tricycle poems because the narrator usually rides through my dreams on a tricycle. “Coming Down for Louie” is an earlier tricycle poem, from a dream I had the night Louie Armstrong died (I was visiting Kansas City at the time—explaining the geography of the poem’s trip). I look for a format that mirrors the mood of the dream and allows that mood to be communicated to the reader who dreams in his contact with the poem. Poetry is one way we dream together.
DREAM REPORT

Going into a little town in Australia, around the turn of the century, driving a '54 white chevrolet. Came to a park with grizzly bears. Hippie girl said I could feed them bananas, obvious that she was hungry. Talked me into it and accompanied me to the little man who sold them. We bought 4, 2 for the big patient bear standing up in his cage, 2 for her, which she agreed to accept because it would take a while to have the zookeeper check out the bear's teeth before he was allowed to eat the bananas. The zookeeper did that, while the girl ate her bananas and the bear patiently submitted to the inspection. Then he told us that before giving the bear the bananas I had to go downtown to the department of Conservation to have the bear given a physical before eating bananas. The bear very patiently got into the back seat and I drove downtown. At the Conservation office they told me the inspector wouldn't be back for 3 hours. The bear was still patient but I was getting a little impatient since I had just meant to pass through town in the first place. So I got on my tricycle and rode around the block with the bear lumbering good-naturedly after me. Discreetly I dropped one of the bananas. On the return trip, I discovered it had been eaten, with only the peels remaining on the street. A jolly little man was picking up the peels and invited us into his house. While the bear waited patiently in the parlor the man led me up to his attic to show me his fantastic collection of old little books, first showing me a metallic purple printed poster he'd made for some literary revival. Then he told me that he was personally supervising the resurrection of Henri Machax's reputation, an Australian writer who wrote in French. I admitted I'd never heard of Henri Machax and promised to look him up immediately when I got home. He insisted that I take a copy of Machax's major work, a little brown-crumbing leather book that was obviously stolen from a library (because the numbers were still vaguely discernible)—and return it to him either directly or c/o AX. I told him I'd return it directly because I knew his address was 171. Then we looked at the book. The first half of it was the work translated into English, the second half in French, beginning, "Il y avait, on dit." The most striking thing in the little book (about 3" square) was the fact that the o's were filled in with abalone—although many of them had fallen out leaving craters in the weathered old paper. At this point the little man, the bear, and I left in the car—they in the front seat, I in the back. The man was driving, and gave the bear the other banana. When the bear was finished with it, the man started grumbling that the bear's paws were all sticky and wet (because he'd licked them). I told him that I knew they would be, because they were that way the first time, and handed him a yellow napkin I had ready for the occasion. Then there was a scuffle in the front seat as the man tried to wipe the bear's paws while the bear good-naturedly kept whopping the man upside the head. Next thing I knew I was driving and looking around for the little man and the bear. They weren't there. I saw only, in the back seat, a crumpled up coat. As I turned my head I swerved into the left lane, nearly side-swiping a pinkred mustang convertible driven by a thin, surly-lipped young man with a child to match, hanging over the edge of the other front seat window. The child said, "Chicken shit, horse shit, bear shit," and I immediately concluded that my car must be dirty so I drove directly into the carwash that happened to be immediately there. As I got out of the car and walked inside, I saw Michele, leaning on his crutches, looking through the glass window at his car. "Ciao, Ken, come stai, vieni di parlare con me." The end.
DOWN UNDER

‘Cycling into Sydney
passed the grizzly
bears,

stopped to buy bananas
for one eyeing
me

earnestly standing high.
Prin zookeeper
checked

condition of bear’s teeth
directing me
down—

town to the Inspector—
who wasn’t in.
Though

the bear was patient I
was in a rush
so

pedalled round the block &
discreetly dropped
one

banana on the street
as he lumbered
good—

naturally in my wake.
When I circled
back

only the peel remained.
Our communion
made

I bade him step aboard.
His gooey
paws

around my shoulders, we
headed out to
sea,

two bizarre banditos
terrifying
law.
COMING DOWN FOR LOUIE

When we left Missouri
our paint was
gleaming

blue. Samuel stood
behind me
pushing

with his left foot
as we climbed
down through

the Ozarks. Most
of the time
we could

cost. He held an orange
umbrella
over

my head & whispered gay
obscenities
in my

ear to distract
me from the
hard work

of pedalling all
hunched up
above

the rusting fender.
Once we tried
to sing

but the notes stuck
in our throats
when we

remembered we
were heading
for New

Orleans to
put away
a friend.

KENNETH JOHN ATCHITY
The following is a more or less direct translation from the visual images of a vividly recalled dream. One line only and the title were added.

_IN MEMORIAM: T. T./S. T._

We grounded our boats by the saltflats & tied them to posts in the reeds where the shadows of galleons still hung in the halflight, each painted & carved deep with eyes like the tail of the peacock & sails thin as nylon pulled tight from your thighs in our nights of imagined lovemaking.

We found from the white sand the track through the forest & heard as its guardians conjured their warnings to all who would venture within to the visions. Macaws & flamingoes and gold birds of paradise all rose as if seeing the cries & the cause of your climax elsewhere.

We watched as the wedding arrived at the clearing & ritual movement unknown but in music led bridegroom & bride to the couch of their union. But I from my terror drew back to remember that Tammi Terrell in the time I’d been writing had died.
I was suddenly awakened, as if by a black hand announcing the title of a book with which I had some intimate connection: *Paul ou L'Insinuation*. The immediate recollection of other images from that dream made the connection clear:

Me estaba hundiendo en la oscuridad cuando oí a mi madre decir, “Te estás hundiendo en la oscuridad. Vas a pagarla bien pronto.” I rose quickly, thinking how a given sign may mean different things in different languages or in different contexts. I dressed and walked out into the white world to contemplate my situation. The city to the west and even the hills to the north were covered with snow, so far immaculate. I decided to pay a visit to an old acquaintance.

Quand je suis arrivé chez elle, elle ne lisait qu'un roman qui s'appelait *Paul ou L'Insinuation*. C'était d'un auteur anonyme.

---

*What am I doing here--prancing thru the jungle like some 40's B movie goddess?*

*So what do I do--build a treehouse to rival the Plaza--foster a teen-age malt-shop relationship with Patrick--!*
Clayton Eshleman

POEM COPIED FROM TEXT WRITTEN IN A DREAM

I, Charles Olson,
left

Oprecht,
walking my bicycle

a trace of chat
on the catless road

seemed to bridge
two far points
moon nodes

where I'd gotten air
the boy said be sure to see
the north ear
the marsh there
nothing intersecting earth
more beautiful

crouched
on the bridge
the faceless one,

Allemutheneira

14 September 1977, Los Angeles
A NOTE ON THE POEM

During August and September, 1975, I copy-edited George Butterick's "Annotations to the Maximus Poems" (of Charles Olson) which The University of California Press published in 1978. My work with the Butterick manuscript involved reading it three times, and often while I would read I would check the poetry of Olson it was annotating. After around six weeks of this, I was really saturated with Olson, and early in the morning, September 14, I had one of those dreams in which a text is presented that appears to be extraordinary. I often have such dreams, sometimes in foreign languages which I "understand" in the dream itself but which, upon waking, evaporate completely. On the morning of the 14th, Olson showed me a poem that he had written after he had died (in 1970), and I made a conscious effort, in the dream itself, to study the poem carefully hoping to remember it when I awoke. I suddenly did awake, with the whole poem still hovering before me, so I jumped out of bed, and raced to my desk and wrote as fast as I could trying not to change anything. Of course I don't know to what extent my imagination was at work even then, but I feel I got a great deal down of what was actually present in the dream.

21 November 1977, Los Angeles

CLAYTON ESHLEMAN
MORAL TALES: “EIGHT MILES FROM TONOPAH”

Zelda’s Orgone Ranch is a mere pustule on the desert’s unheeding rump. Each night incontinent Cadillacs pee green against the’ dobe walls. The lobby’s whimsical slots crank out everything from nickels to Trojans. Encouraged by ten-dollar gags and latex innuendoes, jazzy blondes don see-through lingerie to hustle cocktails. Though neon arrows point upstairs, hard rock pounds a more dangerous rhythm into willing ears. The powder room explodes. Inside, the house dick has nabbed a fellow transvestite, who yells for his lawyer. Tough! His lawyer, already stoned, hugs a ringside table mouthing platitudes to a dish of Crab Louie. There’s no charge for such activities.

Outside, envious rabbits jack off. Laughing coyotes brush their teeth with used Tampax. The alcoholic Paiute dishwasher snores in the corral that guards the pioneer ore wagons from vandals. An ill wind collects tumbleweeds, moldy diapers, back numbers of American Girl. Oceans of homogenized spasm pour down the Mount Pisgah flume to the tool house of Gorgonzola Mine, where “Dusty” Willis is balling an eager young squaw. Meanwhile...

...Mr. Kurtz is dead. The broad catering to his fetishes notes the glazed eyes, takes the expiring pulse, summons Zelda. Together they rifle his pockets and memorize his credit cards: Alvin Kurtz, D.O., Odessa, Wisconsin—32nd degree Mason, teetotaller, real nut. The two collect their fee and proposition the drivers lugging the stiff to the ambulance. Downstairs the fun begins. A rich Houston taxidermist is treating the entire crowd. The barmaids have shed their tops. The house dick, a failed philosophy major, vows to arrest any joker who objects. “KANT!” he screams in his drag-queen falsetto. “KANT-LOCKE-SCHOPENHAUER!” Zelda orders champagne, oysters, garlands of roses mixed with thorns.
Here are two Shakespeare dreams I value.
1. There is no time to rehearse, or even learn the lines; but it is settled: I am to play Prospero in King Lear.
2. An actor-manager type somewhat resembling Noel Coward says he is putting on Hamlet, and would like me to play...what suspense; I lean forward breathless, my chance has come at last...would like me to play Yorick.
Karl Patten

IN THE CAMP
(The Naked Poem)

Max knows names.
He even escaped once,
Two months was he outside.
Fat Max eats with Heinrich
The guard on Tuesdays.
Heinrich the guard is a sausage,
A sausage-eater.
My arm is thinner than yours,
Both are broken broomsticks.
Max the name-knower
Talks too much
To Heinrich the smiler,
He should have got away
For good. His tongue
Is like a cat's
(Remember cats once?)
On Tuesday nights.
Today is Monday.
You and I are hungry.
Tonight we are going to eat
Fat Max and his names.

Dawn, 10/28/72
On IN THE CAMP (THE NAKED POEM)

Over the years, I have used images and phrases from dreams many times in my poems—such material invariably has authenticity for me; I trust it—but only once has an entire poem been “dictated” to me in a dream. That poem is “In The Camp.”

I say “dictated” because this poem appeared in the dream as it appears on the page; all of the words, and even the punctuation, remain unchanged. The circumstances are as follows. I awoke in an October dawn seeing the whole poem before me and rushed to the nearest table, transcribing the whole as fast as I could before it faded. The line-breaks and rhythms I knew were right, and I never hesitated in what were, I suppose, the 60 or 90 seconds that were needed to scribble it down. The experience was an exhilarating one, and it convinced me that the notion of the poet as the vehicle of the muse is a true one, not romantic balderdash.

For me, the poem was completely lucid, no doubt a holdover from the dream, an incident (or rather the plotting of one) in one of the death camps towards the end of World War II. There’s no point in trying to trace the cause of such a dream, but I am reasonably certain of some of the sources. I still remember vividly the first newsreels (quickly suppressed, as it turned out) of the death camps and their survivors in the spring of 1945. I was an adolescent and completely ignorant of such places until seeing that shocking footage, much later to be used by Resnais, Marcel Ophuls, and others. The horror of what Nazism had done to the Jews bit deeply into me, a Gentile. And, of course, in later years I read about those places and learned of their “systems” and of the use of Kapos, which is where the dream focuses.

The one thing that the dream did not give me was a title, but almost immediately after copying out the poem I wrote “The Naked Poem” above it, partly because I had been sleeping raw on a warm night and had never written a poem in the nude before and partly because the material itself was so naked and raw. Friends found the title confusing, and so I changed it to “In the Camp” as a pointer for readers, a needless one in my opinion. I still prefer “The Naked Poem.”
I do not know if the following qualify precisely as dreams, since they occurred in the state between sleep and waking when one’s conscious mind is a spectator or auditor of the fantasia of the unconscious rather than a participant in it; but they are certainly over on the dream side, because there was no conscious control of their development, as there is in the making of a poem when one is possessed by the Daemon but awake. Since the visual and kinetic predominate in so many dreams, I thought it might be interesting to offer examples of totally verbal dreaming or semidreaming, which may be commoner among writers, people whose work is all words, than anyone seems to have noticed yet.

The first occurred about midnight in London in 1969; I was able to recall and write it down when I woke up in the morning.

O do you sail the sundering sea
Twixt Mimminy and Wurge?
If so, buy a harpoon from me
To hunt the Primal Urge.

Harponeer, stay thy bright harpoon!
O’ sailor, stay thy ship!
The Primal Urge obeys the Moon,
And gives us all the slip.

From Mimminy to Wurge, my dears,
From Wurge to Mimminy,
You’ll sail back and forth for years,
And years, and years. You’ll see.

I see the sea, you see the sea, we see the sea.
We see the sea.
We see the sea.
Big Ben Bong Bong
sea
see
C
The whole thing simply floated into mind, as it were, word after word, and I enjoyed it very much, and let it repeat itself several times (which is probably why I could recall it in the morning). I find it interesting that it is one of the most basic English meters and rhyme patterns (4-3-4-3; abab) and that the language is rather Poetic—I wouldn’t use “Twixt,” or the second person singular, if I was in charge. But as I got sleepier the rhyme became repetition and the rhythm sort of died away into a simple beat, while any specious appearance of Meaning floated off into the inner ocean, rocking gently.

The second one occurred again about midnight when I was rather keyed up from writing all evening; its behavior was far more urgent, and I was under the impression that I was making a poem: I memorised it deliberately before falling asleep. Only when I got up in the morning and wrote it down did I realise that I had no idea what it meant, that there were some odd leaps in the syntax, and that in fact I had exerted no conscious control over the thing at all.

You cannot stay forever
on this side of the river
with darkness coming over
and salt has lost its savor.

Therefore they here foregather
another and another
not one is son or father
nor any is your brother.

Then from time’s quiver borrow
the river-spanning arrow
and let the bright track furrow
the shoreless night of sorrow.

I do not know if these are more closely related to “automatic writing” than to actual dreaming; but since I was in bed in the dark, not writing, they certainly felt like dreams. (I have never practiced automatic writing, nor had any desire to.) I wish, when awake and writing poems, I could achieve as effortless a pattern of inner rhyme as this one has.
CIRCLES OF BONE

backbone
whitebone
fishbone
crossbone
you have your mother's backbone
slivered slivered
arc of bone
your mother's backbone
prominent ridged
beneath thin skin
you have no backbone
stand up straight
pierces your heart
that bone
trombone
with this bone I thee wed
bone to bone
bleached bones skull bones
throw the dog a bone
bone of contention
you have your mother's backbone
live close to bone
close to the bone
spare
lean
look
you have no lover
spare
throwing bones
you must believe
they tell bare truths
as dog strips bone
clean
you have your mother's backbone
all we need to know
of circles
is written in our bones
bones alone remain
we build our graves for bones
backbones
blackbones
we bear our mothers' backbones
Unfortunately, I sometimes record my dreams in an incomplete manner and this one has a minimum of detail. It occurred in a night of intense emotion and I recalled the dream in terms of "feeling" rather than in images and details. To make the creation of the poem clearer, though, I will provide both the dream and the circumstances which made the dream.

April 27, 1977 San Francisco: I was staying with a friend, Maria Epes. She is an artist and a fine printer. We share an intense relationship with a strong emphasis on communication and intellectual curiosity. We are very close and during this period of time our friendship was particularly nurturing and inspirational. On this evening Maria had spoken of her mother and said that she has her mother's backbone. It is a shared physical trait. She said that her mother is a survivor, that her backbone is that of a survivor, and that it is noticeable because it stands out clearly, prominently beneath the skin. Maria admires her mother immensely. I admire Maria. That night I dreamt the following:

Maria is in my dream. I am telling her my thoughts about how glad I am for our friendship. She is leaving her apartment, standing at the head of the staircase. I walk over, embrace her.

The next scene occurred in her study where I sleep in a corner on the lounge. I awake several times. When I awake the last time and get up, I realize that a bone is protruding from the area between my left breast and armpit. It doesn't hurt, yet, but I don't understand how it happened. I place Maria's hand on my breast and ask her to feel the bone. Then I tell Ed (man with whom I live) about it but he is not sympathetic. He doesn't think it is serious and is not interested. I am unable to get anyone to understand what it is—something sticking out from my heart. I decide that the bone is actually a piece of my left rib which has slipped or pushed itself up so that it curves over my left shoulder. I cannot tell if it is broken. I awoke with it this way. As time passes, it begins to hurt.

That is all there is to the dream. For several days I couldn't stop thinking about the dream, the image of me with that bone sticking out from my left side, and my fascination with what Maria had said about her mother's backbone. I wrote the poem for Maria.

I am reminded of a quote by Jung which has much significance for me:

We could therefore say that every mother contains her daughter in herself and every daughter her mother, and that every woman extends backwards into her mother and forwards into her daughter...a woman lives earlier as a mother, later as a daughter. (From Essays on a Science of Mythology, "The Psychological Aspects of the Kore," p. 162)
I LOOK FOR HIM WHO LOOKED FOR YOU

You keep on nudging me, mostly in dreams—
keep on keepin' on! seek my son David
he has clues, clues

I look for him who looked for you;
footprints like a fossil of fern
shadow of a hand

on a bone lyre. Next to nothing.
What are those clues clues you keep
insisting on?

    arrow heads point toward a shore
a skeletal sun boat, waters ingathered
like tears spent or misspent; or Lethe crossed
when the raft is the shore.

Not what clues; but clues of what
scout or shepherd, David has asked.
Ask! you urge, nudge.
Is that why
the bone lyre curves like a question?
AND WHERE IN THE WORLD ARE YOU?

I see the wicked glide by
sleek in their velvet hearses
rich beyond measure, egos
puffed like an adder's

No sons of misfortune these;
no cares
shadow the perfumed brows;
a whirligig of furies
their axletree cuts;
the innocent die.

I sweat like a beast
for the fate of my people.
Is God
ignorant, blank eyed
deaf, far distant
bought off, grown old?

They rape the fair world
they butcher, huckster
by the pound, living flesh;
their guns, their gimlets
claim us for trophy.

Why then endure
why thirst for justice?
Your kingdom-cope
a mirage, never comes.

I sweat like a beast
my nightmare is life long
And where in the world
are you?

DANIEL BERRIGAN
from JOURNEYS

I

Genji caught a gray bird, fluttering. It was wounded, so I hit it with a coal shovel. It stiffened, grew straight and symmetrical, and began to increase in size. I took it by the head with both hands and held it as it swelled, turning the head from side to side. It turned into a woman, and I was embracing her. We walked down a dim-lighted stairway holding hands, walking more and more swiftly through an enormous maze, all underground. Occasionally we touched surface and redescended. As we walked I kept a chart of our route in mind—but it became increasingly complex—and just when we reached the point where I was about to lose my grasp of it, the woman transferred a piece of fresh-tasting apple from her mouth to mine. Then I woke.

VII

Underground building chambers clogged with refuse heaps
discarded furniture, slag, old nails,
rotting plaster, faint wisps—antique newspapers
rattle in the winds that come forever down the hall.
ladders
passing, climbing, and stopping, on from door to door.
one tiny light bulb left still burning
—now the last—
locked inside is hell.
Movies going, men milling round the posters
in shreds
the movie always running
—we all head in somewhere;
—years just looking for the bathrooms.

Huge and filthy, with strange-shaped toilets full of shit.
Dried shit all around, smeared across the walls of the adjoining room,
and a vast hat rack.
IX

We were following a long river into the mountains. Finally we rounded a ridge and could see deeper in—the farther peaks stony and barren, a few alpine trees.

Ko-san and I stood on a point by a cliff, over a rock-walled canyon. Ko said, “Now we have come to where we die.” I asked him, what’s that up there, then—meaning the further mountains.

“That’s the world after death.” I thought it looked just like the land we’d been travelling, and couldn’t see why we should have to die.

Ko grabbed me and pulled me over the cliff—both of us falling. I hit and I was dead. I saw my body for a while, then it was gone. Ko was there too. We were at the bottom of the gorge.

We started drifting up the canyon, “This is the way to the back country.”
OUT BACK

The man washes the car under the lemon tree out back.
Calmly down, steps back, extremely pleased with the job.
He calls to the woman he’ll be coming, drives the car
around to the front, takes the key out with just the
right amount of twist. Looks back for specks and rust.

Then he makes a headlong rush out back again, turns
the water off, swears there’s only one thing to do, go!
Breakfast is 8 o'clock as usual, the woman's present,
poaching eggs. She'd rather be alone, does nothing to
calm him down. Who would prevent her from kissing his
neck? By that time the mantle of oblivion would have
been cast over him. He wouldn't have had to check the
car again. Did it with egg in his mouth, bread in hand.

MALLORY ON EVEREST

I have lost the second volume of Chapman’s Odyssey.
Somewhere at a lower camp, in the bleary coldness
Of another dawn, I must have dropped it
And failed to observe the moment that it fell
Down the dark north face of Everest, abode of snow.

Failed to see it fall apart, the torn pages drifting away
On the Tibetan wind. It is no matter.
Tomorrow we climb to Chomolungma’s summit, where a book is too heavy
And too useless.

Tonight I read from Volume One, of the whirlpool and the undergloom,
And hear echoes of the Sirens' song in the winds that blow
Unfettered above this great pillar of the Earth.
At dawn I will tie myself to Irvine
With forty yards of braided line.

Outside the flapping tent the last light glows on the snow
And in my dreams I step from the serac onto a long boat
With black oars and row the ebb through a saltmarsh.
Two migratory birds turn their necks from Polaris
To watch me pass.
JOURNEY

In the beginning, the tree was far.  
The trunk thick and dark, lit from behind, on a hill.  
The branches were heavy. Leafless. Some almost touching the earth.  
But not quite.

The tree haunted the ground, and from where she stood  
looking up at it, she could feel the tree trolls  
turning beneath her. Awed, she came every sunset,  
satisfied to gaze at a distance.

And then one evening, quite suddenly,  
the tree was mantled in white blossoms!  
Also, the tree had moved. Or the earth had leveled.  
She was forced to stand and stare so close  
the blossoms became her sky.

Finally, there was no room but the tree’s room.  
The trunk had grown so round, the branches spread like hawks,  
if she were to remain  
she had no other choice  
but to move inside.

And terrified she did.  
And amazed herself.

At once, her body stretched to fire,  
her face flew off like a dove’s,  
and her arms: a parenthesis of light.

Now, her darkness is the tree’s darkness,  
and her passion’s from the root.  
And her heart—  
not shared,  
but owned.
i did not want to walk

down the corridor.
She would try to act normal
but that was impossible.
She was deaf;
her speech clung
to her mouth like cobwebs.
She persisted in looking
I would smile
She persisted
And when I strained or looked away,
she tugged my arm
I did not want—
Her breasts
so tiny
—to walk
The only two
after night class
in that yellow hall.
If I could have caught her throat to unplug—
She, squeezing her tongue through her teeth,
and her eyes the shape of a cat's
I wanted to give her back, no,
I don't mean that, I mean—
Her face
all broken out I
dream
about her.

COMMENTARY

I had been meditating for about two months and one morning there appeared a
large tree, by large I mean one with a thick bark and broad branches. I felt myself
looking at it from some distance. The tree, the image of it, stayed with me
throughout the week, not only during meditation, however. At some point later in
the month I imagined being very close to the tree, with my body and face pressed up
against it. I enjoy throwing my arms around trees, hugging them, as it were, so I
wasn't surprised with this new image in the meditation. The strangest part, however,
was when several months later I sensed being enclosed in the bark of the tree. This
was part of the meditative image, but it also became a sense of focusing which I
experienced in my daily life, that sense of finally, finally taking full responsibility for
myself.
Samuel Hazo

THE DAY YOUR SON WAS BORN, IT IS

Last night you saw it hooded,
silent, sipping from the saucer
of a child’s skull a child’s
blood.
Tonight it puts aside
that holy wine and leaves you
falling like a dreamer in a void.
It is the darker twin of love.
It comes when you are least
or most prepared.

It is the viper
in your sock, the sand that bogs
you to a stop, the scream
your strain to scream but never
scream.
Awake, you ask
the night if what you dream
is what all fathers dream.
Your midnight house keeps talking
to itself.

A nightlight paints
a gargoyle on the ceiling while
you smoke another inch from yesterday’s
cigar.
For minutes you mistake it
in the smoke until you recognize
the hood, the face averted
and the rest in shadow.

Silent,
it stays as near as air.

It bids
at baccarat with something in another
hood.
Call that its mirror trick.
Call that its solitaire for two
or give it any name that shows
how fear and fear’s illusions
are the same.

As long as you
go on, so does the game.
DREAM AND POETRY: THE CAVE OF IMAGINATION

Kenneth John Atchity

The dream of the poet is to make his return to the unlimited freedom of dream. Some poets mean to take us back to that wonderful realm with them; others seem not to care whether we follow. But we can always go as far as we ourselves can imagine. When the poetic discourse takes a sudden indirection, a “detour” from the main route of expository narrative, if we follow the poet’s signals we find ourselves in the otherwise inaccessible inner sanctuary of poetic vision: the cave of imagination where true poetry is born. There we partake freely of the poet’s dream.

Although even as early as Book 2 of Homer’s Iliad a dream plays a leading role in structuring poetic discourse, perhaps the most intriguing classical example of the use of dream (or dreamlike phenomena, including varieties of aesthetic vision) as a narrative strategy of indirect discourse occurs in Book 6 of Virgil’s Aeneid. Aeneas has seen all he needs to of the cavernous underground, and is now ready to undertake the great labor the sybil had predicted: his return from Hades to the stars. At this juncture the Virgilian narrator reworks a famous passage in the Odyssey (19.560–570), where Homer has the gates of horn and ivory reflect the complementary natures of Odysseus and Penelope (Amory, p. 45). The narrator of the Aeneid now gives us a piece of information that inexplicably undermines the credibility of the entire narration:

There are two gates of sleep; of which one is made of horn, by which easy exit is given to true shades, the other of gleaming ivory polished to perfection, but through which the spirits send false dreams skyward. Here, then, Anchises accompanies his son, and the sybil with him, when all was said—and sends him through the ivory gate. (Aeneid 6.893–98)

Knowing what he now has told us makes us wonder whether the narrator himself believes what he tells us; the discursive progress of the poem—the rhetoric of its structure which is at the same time the structure of Augustan myth—is interrupted, for a moment, by the “indirect discourse” of informational digression. The result of

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Those references not specifically listed in notes are to be found in Dreamworks 1(2).
the suspense in linear progress is a psychological interruption of the poem's aesthetic that casts comprehensive doubt upon the validity of the epic argument, and at the same time upon Virgil's attitude toward his poem's alleged purpose.

The passage is very like the notorious door Sterne "shuts" early in Tristram Shandy against the reader who cannot stand digressions—and never opens again. As the first half of the Aeneid comes to a close, with Aeneas prepared to assume the title of "father" now that he has come to terms with his dead father Anchises, Virgil has constructed, through an amazing indirection, what might be called an aesthetically proleptic gap, or progressive hiatus, in his otherwise straightforward linear narrative. The gap is proleptic because its significance increases as the poem continues; the hiatus is progressive because the reader realizes its effect gradually as its logic reorganizes the remainder of the epic. The discursive anomaly; that is, is not left behind here in Book 6, but is carried forward to the end of the Aeneid—as though the second half of the poem were charged magnetically by this "gap" in its logical structure. Aeneas comes back to the surface of the fictional world through the gate of false dreams; and the Virgilian narrator has gone out of his way to inform us of this. The chief character of the epic, his substantiality within his heroic world carefully linked to the legendary prehistory of Rome, is with this single stroke severed from seamless credibility. As he walks toward Tiber, the hero of Virgil's epic is no more substantial—no more palpably real—than the shade of Palinurus we meet with him in Hades.

What does Virgil mean to express with this surprising narrative technique and its undermining strategy? Why this reference to dreams and their implied relationship with the characters of poetic fiction? Is the narrator suggesting that Aeneas is a kind of dream (the false kind)—that the epic myth, propagated by Virgil at the request of Augustus, is as unsubstantial as a dream? Of course, he may be telling us that dreams are as substantial as myths—that ready-made myths, the products of the poetic imagination, can play as meaningful a role in reality as can myths inherited from the remote past (formed by the archetypal unconscious, in Jung's terms). Joseph Campbell's alliance of psychology and anthropology comes to mind: "Myths are public dreams; dreams are private myths." The private manufactured myth of Augustus can become the public dream of the Roman people, providing the empire with a heritage and mythic force to complement its present imperial force.

Yet an altogether different interpretation may be as valid: that Virgil is allowing his narrator to doubt the authenticity of his own narrative, to doubt its mythic qualities, and so, perhaps, to express subtly the inadequacy of an urbane poet faced with reconstructing a myth that—no matter how complicated and beautifully expressed—must always remain only pseudo—Homeric; for Homer could call upon the living treasury of actual myth, while Virgil must rely upon the conscious invention and elaboration of the individual, and imperially dictated, imagination. This sudden and immense sense of doubt—the accumulating suspicion of the unsubstantiality of Virgil's hero—accompanies us to the very end of the Aeneid and its unilluminated shadows. The progressive hiatus of this indirect discourse (the digression on the gates) diminishes our conviction at the same time that the direct discourse seeks to affirm it. The result is the enhanced sense of "depth" we experience when we read Virgil's poignant masterpiece.

Macrobius' intriguing commentary on the dream of Scipio and Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy link the dream literature of the classical and medieval periods. The Middle Ages are replete with dream poetry, from Dante's Commedia to the Roman de la Rose. No medieval dream poem is more subtle and psychologically persuasive than Chaucer's Booke of the Duchess, in which the dramatic tension between narrator-as-dreamer and dreamer-(awakened)—as-narrator dictates the reader's involvement with and response to the poem's
treatment of the relationship between death, memory, and perfection. From the
dark cave of Morpheus (the god of sleep), the poem moves to the visionary
perfection of the narrator's dream; the black knight the narrator encounters in his
dream is at one and the same time the narrator's suffering self and any self, with
whom the reader (and particularly John of Gaunt, to whom the poem is supposedly
directed) can identify. The suffering is resolved by the dream on one hand and by
the poem as dream for the reader on the other hand.

From Santa Teresa and Juan de la Cruz to Pilgrim's Progress, the
Renaissance continued to exploit the relationship between dream and poetry in
every way imaginable. Shakespeare, like his great contemporary Calderón, (who
wrote Life Is a Dream), took theatrical advantage of the analogies between dream
and drama. Macbeth murders sleep (Richard Wilbur's poem in this issue reverses
the metaphor), so that the ravelled sleeve of care remains, for him, unknit—as it
does for Hamlet and Richard III; Richard complains that his night has been so
full of "ghastly dreams. / That...I would not spend another such night. / Though
'twere to buy a world of happy days." Mercutio, in Romeo and Juliet, calls dreams
"the children of an idle brain, / Begot of nothing but vain fantasy" and doesn't let
them bother him at all. We experience much more in A Midsummer Night's Dream,
where Shakespeare mixes dream with fantasy, visions, hypnotic spells, magic, and
every form of enchantment imaginable—leading to Theseus' famous formula,
linking these phenomena with madness, poetry, and love:

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
Are of imagination all compact:
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold,
That is, the madman; the lover, all as frantic,
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt;
The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The form of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

Theseus' statement concludes with the rationale by which we believe in the reality of
dream and of poetry:

Such tricks hath strong imagination,
That if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy;
Or in the night, imagining some fear,
How easy is a bush supposed a bear! (4.1)

Theseus' objectivity would be corroborated by McCrady and Hobson (1977); but
neither the theatrical king nor the contemporary neurobiological investigators
would deny for a moment the reality of dream's effect on human behavior. "What
visions I have seen!" Titania declares to Oberon; Bottom, awakening from his
vision, declares in a marvelous parody of Corinthians: "I have had a dream, past the
wit of man to say what dream it was." After the indirect discourse of parody has
managed to communicate what Bottom says cannot be communicated, the
dreamer finds a name for it:

... The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able
to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was...It shall be
called Bottom's Dream, because it hath no bottom... (4.1)
St. Paul’s mystical vision is translated into Bottom’s fantasy, puckishly rearranged both in drama and language.

Sleep, dreams, death, ghosts, memories, madness, and imagination circulate through Shakespeare’s plays like a vitalizing current; he understood, as Borges points out, “the fundamental identity of existing, dreaming, and acting” (Borges, 1970, p. 46). Both in Hamlet’s famous soliloquy (3.1) and in Act 4 of The Tempest the metaphorical identification of life and dream, drama and imagination, is given natural expression and natural closure:

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air;
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp’d towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve;
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is round’d with a sleep... (5.1)

Like his character Prospero Shakespeare himself understood how the theatre allows the poet to direct his dreams in such a way that the audience can take part in them.

Another great contemporary who understood the poetic function of dream was Cervantes, who died the same year as Shakespeare. The “cave of the Montesinos” episode of Don Quixote is a marvelous intertextual indirect on the part of the master strategist of indirect discourse. Whether the hero’s account of his descent is a “dream report”—as Sancho suspects and Don Quixote stalwartly denies—or a dreamlike fabrication matters not at all because it strays not “one iota” from Don Quixote’s sacred vision of the truth. One remarkably incidental element at the start of this famous episode strikes me as most perplexing and enchanting. After Don Quixote has been bound with the lowering-rope by Sancho and the cousin and is ready to descend, he pauses to say:

It was thoughtless of us not to have provided ourselves with some little cattle bell to attach near me on the same rope so that you might be able to tell from the sound of it that I was still descending and still alive. However, since that is no longer possible, I am in God’s hands—may He be my guide.³

The case of the missing cattle bell has always intrigued me. Why would the narrator have his character tell us about a bell he himself and/or his character forgot to insert in the narration proper; why would he use indirect discourse to point out the insufficiency of his primary direct discourse? We might not have noticed the insufficiency otherwise. Now we are led to believe that the character’s memory is superior to that of the chronicler: a strange state for us to be in, who expect chroniclers to imagine characters and not the other way round.

The cattle bell, which is absent from Don Quixote’s world except in his speech and imagination (his imagined imagination, after all), is all the more present in our world, as we hold the narrative which includes his speech in our hands (and in our imagination). Therefore the bell has the effect Don Quixote (and Cervantes) intends: it has alerted us to the significance of the entire Montesinos episode. Without the bell there, we now know, we cannot measure the depths of Don Quixote’s exploration by any familiar external measure. We will have only his report (the bell here, in our imagination) and we have no alternative but to accept all he tells us or to reject all.
The nature of the cave is enough to remind us of where indirect discourse means to take us when it relieves us of our reason: it transports us from the direct discourse of the poetic fiction to a narrative hiatus where anything but what goes in direct discourse goes (Lewis Carroll understands the advantages of the dream strategy when he sends Alice plunging to the bottom of a familiarly strange well). For the cave is almost inaccessible, covered with “thick bushes” (“montesinos” in Spanish, making us wonder which came first, the bushes or the Count—which world gives its name to the other?), ineffably deep, unexplored, eternally waiting only for the most intrepid discoverer. “Just such an undertaking as this,” Don Quixote tells us with Biblical solemnity (none of Dante’s complexly false modesty about him), has been reserved for him from the earliest times. Only he can free the inhabitants of the cave from the spell which holds them enchanted—a most topsy-turvy arrangement, when the enchanted world down there is unenchanted by the emissary from the unenchanted world up here whose normal role up here is that of enchanter. All this suggests Don Quixote’s origins: he is, after all, a self-appointed emissary. We needn’t pursue detailed comparisons with Homer, Virgil, Plato’s Republic, Dante, and Rabelais to see that Cervantes’ cave has an ancient history. As important as its history is its psychological significance.

The cave, whether we associate it with the “subconscious” or the “unconscious” (Freud’s or Jung’s term, respectively) or not, is where Cervantes locates imagination. On one hand, it is the imagination of Don Quixote; and on the other, it is the imagination of all human beings, and is particularly emblematic of the poet’s imagination now expressed by the poet’s avatar Don Quixote. The darkness of the cave is not only the darkness of death, but also the night darkness of dreams (The Egyptians were the first to express the connection between the two, believing that the soul leaves the body during sleep and in death); dream, like death, is liberation, freedom to move by volition only, without limitation. And freedom, to the artist, to us, is identified with life; Virginia Brady Young’s poem, in this issue is an example:

Summoned in a dream,
I sought my brother in the earth,
falling through ancient graves
to the beginning of Spring.

Interrupting the primary narrative of Don Quixote (and pre-empting the primary narrator, as Homer does in the Odyssey when Odysseus takes over his own story in the court of Alkinoös), the poet sends his character to explore the depths of the cave. The character’s subsequent report, if we can figure out how to receive it, may be of great use to us in exploring this work of Cervantes’ imagination and the function and products of our own. Don Quixote’s stature is mythic: his sacred, priestly, shamanic character is defined in his ability and determination to accept the mission to explore fully and unflinchingly the deepest recesses of the cave; and, most importantly, to return skyward and tell us what he found and saw. Will we believe his eyes? His words? Do we believe Aeneas fresh from the ivory gate? Do we “believe” the dreams of others, or even our own?

The episode makes us wonder about our ability as readers external to the fiction although Borges has warned us that our external position is by no means secure (Borges, 1964) to differentiate between the fiction of Don Quixote’s dreamlike experience and the dreamlike nature of Don Quixote’s continuous, Odyssean, ever-turning fiction (as his account of the journey creates it in miniature): the product, that is, of his inexhaustible verbal imagination, imagined for him by Cervantes. Because Don Quixote says what he imagines and imagines what he says, we must be content to imagine what he says and to accept what he imagines without any unnecessary reaching out after fact (as Keats had it) since, in this story, unimagined fact has nothing to do with truth. Since Don Quixote (and his Merlin

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Cervantes) invents worlds as he speaks, how in any world can we know that he isn't inventing what he saw in the cave as he talks? "For the poet, as for God, the word becomes the world." As both John Hollander and Denise Levertov indicate in their essays, the making of the poem is itself a reentering into dream vision. The reentry has organic life of its own, whose form is revealed only as it unfolds. The poet dreams in the cave, awakens to recall the intensity of his or her descent, then reenters the cave with his waking eyes open, during the writing of the poem—and, in doing so, may discover things not seen in the cave before, or at least not recalled. As Holly Prado (p. 132) puts it: "What can ever be explained?...I shout, 'the end of that kind of poem becomes what you've learned in the process of writing the poem itself!'...then I'm in a cave full of orange-red pillars: it's my creative world." The poet sees when she dares to open her mouth.

Don Quixote says he "traveled into that obscure region below without any certain or determined path," and so are we uncertain, but nonetheless filled with eagerness to see, as we descend with his words into the narrative, the indirect dreamlike discourse, of his descent. The extent of Don Quixote's adventures down there shows us that imagination is aloof from time; it is in the world of imagination that the Spanish and Italian proverbs have their truest significance: "la vida es corta pero ancha" ("life is short but wide") and "c'e più tempo che vita" ("there's more time than life"). We all know it often takes more time to say what we imagine than to imagine what we say; the translation between the two worlds—of imagination and expression—is inexorably doomed to insufficiency. We continue to attempt it, constructing what Lowry Nelson calls "the rhetoric of ineffability," only because the energy that flows into us from the crack between the two worlds seems somehow to be the most meaningful energy we know. Response to the dreamlike strategies of discourse used by poets to return us to dream requires the active effort of the reader's imagination. When a poem, like a dream, presents its images "without transition," as when an old film jumps in the projector" (Richard Wilbur, "Walking to Sleep," p. 106), we must provide the transition or the readiness to experience the poem's images without transition. Although in this respect dream-poem syntax resembles film syntax, the reader of the poem is even more actively involved than the audience of a film. The poem will not keep running without our participation; it lapses into silence.

"I think," Sancho tells his master after hearing only part of the account, "that Merlin or those enchanters that laid a spell on the whole crowd Your Grace says you've seen and communicated with down there have stuck into your imagination or your memory all this machination that you've been narrating to us, and all that remains to be narrated." Sancho's sweeping dismissal places him in an excessive position which neither he nor he want to maintain. But something true is said in the middle of it: the identification of imagination (imaginación) and memory (memoria). We are almost relieved to hear how easily Don Quixote's imagination rises to Sancho's incredulous challenge: " 'Such a thing could be, Sancho,' replied Don Quixote, 'but it is not so in this case; for I have narrated what I saw with my own eyes and touched with my own hands.' "

What the poet sees in the dark cave he sees for us (as Teiresias saw for Oedipus who would not accept the prophet's vision). As Allen Katzman's poem in this issue puts it, "A DOOR IS OPEN./ An immense stairway, infinite and accessible." Robert Gluck's "Poem" (p. 130) suggests that the cave is a mouth, its free atmosphere derived from its emotional, sexual, vegetable consistency (William Morris, too, sees it as a garden of creativity [p. 111]—and we are approaching nearer the primal myth). Why should we not believe what Don Quixote tells us or will tell Sancho and us about the cave? What reason have we strong enough to contradict a shaman? He has gone into the other world for us. Gary Snyder's "Journeys" ends with another example of the poet's descent:

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We were at the bottom of the gorge. We started drifting up the canyon, “This is the way to the back country.”

The poet goes into that “undiscover’d country” (as Hamlet calls it, referring to death and dream at once) from which no waking traveler returns; but he returns in that exceptional waking action known as poetry—to tell us what he saw “up the canyon,” in “the back country.” Richard Wilbur’s ironic narrator in “Walking to Sleep” also speaking of a labyrinthine descent, warns, “Nor must you dream of opening any door/ Until you have foreseen what lies beyond it/” but the poet is precisely the one who opens doors without foresight, relying only on the exhilaration of hindsight, of having been there before. Caution is foreign to the poet; he wants only to see and speak the truth of the cave.

What Heraclitus meant when he said, “the way up and the way down are the same thing” is not that going is the same as coming back; but rather that the path, the way that joins the waking world with the dreaming world, the world of day with the world of night, life with death, begins at the same place. That place is the center of being occupied by the poet (as well as the madman and the prophet), where one moves freely from one state of awareness to another, “keeping in touch,” as contemporary jargon has it, with the sources of our life. Mythology calls that “way” the axis mundi, the tree at the navel of the earth (whose roots mirror its branches, as with the ancient oak of Dodona, sacred to Zeus—recalled in Doraine Poretz’s poem and commentary in this issue) up and down which the poet climbs freely to explore all the possible realms of experience:

The first function of art is exactly... the first function of mythology: to transport the mind in experience past the guardians—desire and fear—of the paradisal gate to the tree within of illuminated life. In the words of the poet Blake, in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell: “If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is, infinite.” But the cleansing of the doors, the wiping away of the guardians, those cherubim with their flaming sword, is the first effect of art... (Campbell, p. 164)

Another name for that axis, the way referred to by Heraclitus, is the human spine (with the serpent at its base, as in Kundalini yoga), with those circles of bone that point like arrows from birth to death and beyond both. Daniel Berrigan’s poems share these images with Linda Puffer’s (both in this issue): “the bone lyre curves like a question.” How witless it would be of us to say we don’t believe in someone’s imagination; for the cave of imagination is the ineffable source of poetic vision and the poet brings back from it what he or she wants to share with us. If we don’t trust the poet, we close off the cave to ourselves forever.

W. S. Merwin’s “A Fable of the Buyers” (p. 182) expresses the inability of waking thought to reduce the freedom of dream and imagination to its insistently rational categories. The demand for reason in all things, allowed to become obsessive, can destroy our access to the cave altogether—though it cannot affect the cave—which continues to exist whether we care to enter it or not. Direct discourse must relate a to b and then to c and so on before it can prove to us how z is connected with a; as it progresses in this orderly, linear fashion, direct discourse may become too thin to shadow forth “the form of things unknown” from the depths of the cave. William Moritz’s comment makes a similar point: The poetic narrator—from Dante and Chaucer to Calderón and Shakespeare; from Cervantes to Keats and Shelley and Poe, and to the poets whose works are collected in this issue—finds ways to introduce the shadows while yet remaining up here with us in the light of
accessible discourse. Indirect discourse is a strategy that allows the poet to avoid retreating entirely into surrealism or into dream itself—where juxtaposition can occur with freely turning serendipity.

Indirect discourse—strategies of temporary digression, flashback, internal narrative, associational narrative, insight into characters' dreams, fabulous narrative, and myriad other variations—brings the cave as much as possible to light, turns those obscure forms into shapes, and gives them, like the cattle bell, "a local habitation and a name" up here in our waking imaginations. We are thereby given poetic access to depth, in the sense intended by Ortega y Gasset; "Depth is fatally condemned to become a surface if it wants to be visible" (p. 59). Sometimes the poet descends in order to see what must be seen, the naked truth (as in Kathleen Fraser's comment in this issue). Sometimes the poet returns from the depths of the cave to remind us of obvious truths we have been overlooking; and we are chilled by the poem as much as by our recognition of our own negligence. Linda Puffer's "Circle of Bones" is an example of this, showing us our race as a continuous bridge of backbones, a bridge that leads in all directions of human experience; the dream strategy here is chant, incantation, and the result is a spell in which we share the poet's vision, moving from individual to generic consciousness as the spell ends and we re-emerge from dream to waking. So the dreamlike strategies of indirect discourse attenuate the impression of narrative lucidity (which, despite the optical metaphor, does not accurately mirror the complexities of life) and can lend to narrative the depth of reality and myth. In this way, narrative becomes a successful imitation in Aristotle's sense, showing us not merely things that are or were, but what we want most to see, things that might be or could be (Aristotle, p. 1464).

"Was it a vision, or a waking dream? / Fled is that music—Do I wake or sleep?" Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" holds our attention precisely because we don't know where we are in it. Surface, direct discourse, can give us only hints of the depths of experience; but discourse becomes most inspiring when it freely gives those hints, and least invigorating when it avoids all "hints" in a determination to remain wholly logical and precise. As Unamuno says, "Dream abides. It is the only thing that abides. Vision abides." There is no worse terror imaginable, as Allen Katzman's poem declares, than to imagine an end to imagination:

IN 1935 WHEN THINGS GOT TOUGH

A DOOR IS OPEN

THERE IS NO VOICE
THERE IS NO IMAGE
THERE IS NO VISION

Wasielek puts it this way:

In dreamwork spatial relations like contiguity, succession, transformations and order take the place of such logical relations as cause and effect, comparison and contrast, and either-or relations. Both dream and art seem to be a re-translation of a world sorted out by logic back into a more primitive mode of apprehension and perhaps a fuller apprehension of the world's body. (pp. 158–159)

Among the greatest contemporary practitioners of the dreamlike strategies is Gabriel García Márquez, whose expansion of Borges' metaphor of the parallel mirrors, in Cien años de soledad, is the dream of the infinite rooms of José Arcadio Buendía. Stanislaw Lem's Solaris includes within the scope of its narrative every conceivable form of dreamlike phenomena (copies, hallucinations, delirium, drugs, intoxication, daydreams, memories, reveries, meditation, chimeras, trance, mirror

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images, incubi, mirages, trance, ghosts, doubles) to remind us how close to infinite are things imaginable, how many more numerous are the obscure forms than the local shapes of the limited surface world. Hubert Selby’s Requiem for a Dream includes a marvelous scene in which Sara Goldfarb, under the influence of amphetamines prescribed for her diet, loses all ability to distinguish between the image-screen of her television set and that of her own mind. She sees herself walking across the television stage and, before long, the projective process is reversed as announcer, audience, and technicians trailing cables, walk through her apartment disapproving of its rundown condition. (The Summer 1981 issue of Dreamworks, “Dream and Fiction,” will be devoted entirely to the use of dream in novels and short stories.)

More directly than my previous examples, this one brings to mind the state of imagination in the present time. On the one hand, we seem once again ready to accept that poets have created the cave of imagination and that the question of its reality, of its “real” existence, is answered by pointing to the library of poetry; if the imagined cave is only a poetic projection, it is nonetheless (and, by some arguments, all the more) real for being so. On the other hand, contemporary psychology seems on the verge of accepting a holistic view of the psyche, including imagination. Our consciousness need no longer be analytically subdivided into post-Freudlan excessively rationalistic categories (conscious, subconscious, un-, pre-, and semi-conscious) without physiological basis—as useful as these subdivisions may have been for awhile. (Clayton Eshleman’s comment in this issue implies a distinction between dream and imagination, associating the latter with the waking will directing images into intended patterns. My preference is to use the term “imagination” in a broader sense; in this sense imagination includes, indeed starts with, dream, its psychological and neurophysiological origins.) To be human is to be aware. Period. Are we not aware when we are asleep and dreaming? Contemporary brain research, especially the work of William Dement and of Robert W. McCrley and J. Allan Hobson, has made it clear that we are perceptive, active, and inventive while we are asleep. The sheer energy that freely identifies one experience and one mode of imagery with another, as in the puns of Lawrence P. Spingarn’s adaptation of this issue or the mysterious symbolic language of Eshleman’s “Atlemetheneira” (recalling Fellini’s “ASA NISI MASA” from 8½) is all the “proof” we need. Such untranslatable dream inventions (see also, in this issue, the dreamed puns in Denise Levertov’s appendix) may even be considered the most serious products of imagination we have access to—precisely because of their irreducible purity, which makes the puns into a kind of self-sufficient verbal music. There are no sharp or natural divisions except those we invent and, in times of waking absent-mindedness, believe in as though they were autonomous forces. As John Hollander argues, the interface only appears to exist. We can’t put our finger on the “border of our two countries.” It is a “fable not of the sea of figure as opposed to the literal shore, but of a division made at right angles to the coast-line, as it were, by which what lies on either side of the boundary would look identical.”

What are we are of? Images. And the imagination, as Aristotle understood it (fontasia), is the name we give to that contraption which processes these images, copes with them, controls them, delights in them:

Try to remember this: what you project
Is what you will perceive; what you perceive
With any passion, be it love or terror,
May take on whims and powers of its own.

(Wilbur, p. 107)

The contraption remembers images, fictionalizes them, dreams them, hallucinates them, prophesies them, senses them, juxtaposes them in patterns not found in the

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fabric of “external” or “empirical” or “waking” or “prosaic” reality but patterns nonetheless real (and in many cases, good and bad, in our history, even more real) for being mysteriously unprecedented and surprisingly mysterious and native only to the human mind. The imagination anatomizes images, isolating their (sometimes imagined) discrete components, as when Ortega y Gasset speaks of the unique beauty of a faded color, or when Mark McCloskey or Virginia Brady Young speaks of color as a discrete image which their vision recognizes and reassembles: “Pain flows into yellow, yellow blends with blue.”

The imagination projects the images on our internal screen, marvelously described by Richard Wilbur’s closing lines, as “a pool/ On whose calm face all images whatever/ Lay clear, unfathomed, taken as they came.” Taking them on its face, that pool reshapes the images in its depths (whether we consider those depths in neurophysiological, mythic, religious, psychological, or “mysterious” terms). The images, as we kneel “at the well-curb” (of Frost’s poem, “For Once, Then, Something”) come into focus and, at that moment of introspective attention, on the farthest wall of the cave, what we see, according to Dante, is our own face:

That revolving action that seemed...
To be conceived in you as a reflected light,
Looked as if it were painted, inside itself,
In its own color, with our effigy...

(Paradiso, 33.127–132, trans. Luigi Biancolli)

Edited on the internal creative screen, the images are then projected by the imagination outward onto the screens of others. The imagination perceives the effects of the transmission on those who receive it, receives image-signals back from the receivers (who are also senders): the revised images of ourselves which are, as poets and philosophers have argued, often more important to us than our internally projected and received self-images (if indeed it is possible to shape an image “on the inside” alone).

Joyce Carol Oates (p. 123) suggests that one of the most important functions of imagination is to build rationalizations by which we survive our pain from day to day, even changing good to evil: “My ‘sickness’ was in fact their survival and nourishment.” Dream has the freedom unknown in waking life to change death to life through the simple imaginative process of juxtaposition and merging—as in Gary Snyder’s poem where the dead bird turns into a woman who walks with the narrator “down a dim-lighted stairway/ holding hands, walking more and more swiftly/ through an enormous maze, all underground.” The circle never ends, only enlarges; and the circle is never a straight line:

The circle grows larger
out into the street, sidewalks
of inexhaustible content which hold in it
infinite rays of light and swallow
all the multiplicities there are
in the world.  

(Katzman, p. 127)

“As long as you/ go on,” says Samuel Hazo’s poem (this issue), “so does the game.” Or as Gary Snyder has it, the “movie” is “always running inside us.”

Ruth Dagon’s “Catch Me Someone” shows us that the circling imagination of dream takes us, not just down, but back, into the past. In the dream cave of imagination, memory and wish (Marcel says hope is a memory of the future) find each other. Their marriage, consecrated by the poet’s daring to open her mouth and speak immediately upon returning, issues in poetry:
Years rush up to meet me.
Friends call from upper storeys.
I plunge past men
With eyes turned inward,
Women self-contained as cactus,
Children sticky with alphabet parings.

Here, as in Oates’ and Kate Braverman’s poems, the cave is identified with both the body and the city’s buildings, as containers of multiplicity. The practice of poetic-speech—after-dream—what René Magritte called “self-willed dream”—eventually allows the practitioner, as Levertov implies in her essay, to reenter the dreamtime (to use the Australian term) automatically in the creation of poetry. Some poets represented in this issue speak of being dictated to by the dream; Karl Patten writes: “The experience was an exhilarating one, and it convinced me that the notion of the poet as the vehicle of the muse is a true one, not romantic balderdash.” Ursula LeGuin suggests it is a form of possession (“by the Daemon”) that occurred when she was “keyed up” (the idea of ecstasy induced by intense creative action is as old as the Greeks and as contemporary as clinical studies conducted at UCLA under the impetus of Norman Cousins).

Both Patten and LeGuin resist the concept of automatic writing because it suggests the creative volition is not their own. An alternative explanation for the poet’s fluid transcription of his vision into verse that allows us to share it is his ability and confidence to reenter the dream cave, the place of contact with imagination, by opening his mouth, by beginning to write—without knowing what will come next. The poet, then, is someone who, through practice or even habit, has easy access to the other worlds. “I make no distinction,” Braverman writes, “between dream and reality.”

Memory also dreams; and the dreams of memory are what we call fiction and poetry. McCloskey explains the relationship between dream and memory this way: “I suspect that a dream... is the poem that memory on some irreducible level of frustration makes in the body when the power of choice and discrimination goes to sleep.” If the poet remembers memory’s poem when he awakens he may shape from it another poem that becomes a part of recorded memory. As the circle widens, our individual memory fixes recalled dreams, and dreams reported or fictionalized by others, in our imaginations where they become integral parts of our evolving identities. (At the same time, poetized memory, poems adapted from dreams, become part of our historical, collective mind—the public dreams Campbell speaks of.) We will always have a contemporary literature, which reflects our imagination like a mirror, whatever direction it is turned. We find images everywhere. After all, as Faulkner reminds us—“There is no such thing as was; if was existed, there would be no grief or sorrow.”—distinctions between one time and another are also arbitrary impositions with no commanding hold upon the continuum of reality as our full consciousness experiences it, whether dreaming freely, awake and looking through the cleansed windows of perception, or anywhere in between.

What is the relationship between what we remember and fictionalize and what we perceive and objectively know? Only that what we perceive is always, as Heraclitus stated long ago, changing; and thereby denying us the stability psychological identity demands. Memory, imagination, dream also change, yet much more gradually. The process of their changing produces our enduring identities for us, the ones by and with which we live from day to day and from year to year, as they fictionalize our perceptions, revising them so they can be involved in the imagination of others. The imagination is not a moral but a poetic force, offering us not imperatives or taboos but merely choices; it presents us with images, possible and fantastic, and our waking mind chooses those images it needs to live with.
Today, more than ever before, we are bombarded with images from the world around us, and therefore from our own imagination; and we need the bombardment because we have more choices to make than ever before, and more unprecedented choices. Neruda said, "there is no insurmountable solitude," and we work toward surmounting the destructive solitudes that can affect our future by communicating and sharing our dreams. We partake of the poet's dream by allowing our imagination to follow his or her directions back to the cave—especially following indirections.

NOTES

1. Amory associates horn with "unmistakable truth," ivory with "unrecognized truth."
4. In the matter of saying what one imagines and imagining what one says, I might refer to Michel Foucault's famous statement, in The Order of Things (New York, 1970): "It is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say" (p. 9). Although Foucault accurately describes the relationship between perception and linear (surface) discourse, I would argue that his statement has no truth value with regard to indirect poetic discourse in which depth is communicated in what Borges calls the "interstices" between words or lines.

REFERENCES

"A FABLE OF THE BUYERS"

A man walked out on the street with three dreams for sale. Of course he would not tell anyone what they were. He even said that he couldn't, because the dreams wouldn't be the same for them. He couldn't tell them anything about the dreams at all. They were there like straws to be drawn. Everyone hopes for better dreams than his own, and people bought them. The dreams were to be opened in private, the buyers were told. They were printed on exactly the same paper, which was made to dissolve as it was read, or to dissolve anyway if someone tried to keep it without reading it, like a talisman, so that it might produce its dream that way as everything can do if the right spirit approaches it. A little later they would return to sight in the man's hand.

People who bought the dreams sometimes met each other later and tried to compare which dreams they had bought. Very suspiciously at first. Very cautiously, with hints back and forth. Everyone found out after a while that the other person seemed to have bought a different dream. But then it turned out finally that there were too many of them in the same room for them all to have had different dreams, and they started arguing with each other. For they had all seen that there were only three dreams in the man's hand.

But with each person each dream clearly had been different. And still the buyers wanted to know which of the three dreams they had had. They tried everything. They classified by means of every triad they could think of. They divided each other into three factions, which never seemed accurate enough. They kept changing sides and never forgiving each other. Eventually, in order to check, two of them tried to read the same dream at the same time, and it disappeared at once, entirely, and never reappeared in the man's hand. That happened again and the man was left with only one.

"Now won't the others come back at all?" he was asked.
"No," he said. "But it doesn't matter. They were all copies of the same dream."

"Will you sell us that one?" they asked.
"No," he said. "I'm going to give it back."

"Which one is it?" they asked, almost in unison. For none of them had learned anything at all. What can you learn from a bought dream?
DREAM AND POETRY: A PRELIMINARY CHECKLIST

John D. Engle

The following checklist is a starting point for the study of dream and its relationship to poetry. It includes only secondary materials, primarily in English—criticism, history, synthesis, theory. A selected list of primary sources (poems that employ dreams as subject or method) will appear at a later date.

To a degree this checklist is arbitrary. A complete bibliography would have to include a large proportion of the published criticism on such poets as Dante, Chaucer, or Coleridge, whose works often rely heavily upon dream and vision. Consequently, within the limitations of space and good sense, I have tried to choose those critical works which focus most sharply upon the relationship of dream to poetry or the process of creating poetry. In addition, I have suggested a few broad studies that might be useful both in themselves and for the bibliographies they may include.

I have organized the checklist chronologically, placing works which do not fit easily within one time period in an introductory "General" section. I have annotated only the references I was able to inspect; of course, some, like Freud or Jung, need no introduction.

For such a checklist to remain fully useful, it must live, charged by continual revision and addition. We hope the readers of Dreamworks will help insure the continuous development of our resources for the study of dreams and literature (fiction as well as poetry) by contributing to subsequent editions of the checklist. If you have a pertinent entry to suggest, please contact me at the following address:

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0192-2890/80/000-0183 $00.95 © 1980 Human Sciences Press
Generalizes about the significance and role of dreams in primitive societies, with implications re. the relationship between dreams and literature. Includes chapter on an "Historical Review of Dream Interpretation" and long section on dreams and various American Indian cultures.


A wide-ranging annotated bibliography of primary and secondary materials in many fields related to dream study.


Included in this history of dream works and attitudes toward dreams are numerous remarks on the dream in poetry, from the Greeks through Eliot's "Hollow Men."


Implications re. dreams and poetry. Useful annotated bibliography of early works applying psychoanalytic methods to literature.


Includes useful bibliographical essays, "The Dream in World Literature" and "The Dream in Spanish Literature."


Covers the frequent occurrence of dreams in literature, including "Dream of the Rood," "Pearl," Piers Plowman, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Bunyan, the Romantics, and others.


ANCIENT


Cf. particularly chapter IV, "Dream-Pattern and Culture-Pattern."


JOHN D. ENGLE


Of interest in studying Greek literature. Covers role of dreams in magic, mythology, and divination.

Includes chapters on dreams as inspiration to writing, and atmosphere. Appendix briefly summarizes uses of dreams by individual authors.

Deals with dreams and the Bible. Views dreams solely as divine messages with roles ordained in the Bible.


MEDIEVAL

Aronoff, Marcia. "Dream and Non-Dream in Dante's The Vita Nuova." Cithara 16, i, pp. 18-32.

Covers Chaucer's enhancement of his source, Boccaccio's Il Filostrato. Analysis of several dreams for Oedipal content.


Covers the relationship between Chaucer's knowledge of medieval scientific principles and the Canterbury Tales. Includes chapters on "Medieval Dream-Lore" and "Chautenclere and Pertelote on Dreams."

Applies classical and medieval dream theory to Chaucer's dream vision.


Stresses significance of Narrator/Dreamer's psychological state and importance of the whelp leading him to the Black Knight.


Deals with the dreamer in the C Passus of Piers Plowman and the psychological significance for Langland of certain of the dream sequences.


Spearing, A. C. Medieval Dream-Poetry. Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1976. Excellent survey of dream-poetry in English from 14th to 16th Century. Among other topics, discusses classical, Biblical, and French sources, Chaucer, the Chaucerian and alliterative traditions. Includes useful "Booklist" of primary and secondary sources.


RENAISSANCE THROUGH 18th CENTURY

Bareham, Terence. George Crabbe. London: Clarke, Doble, & Brendon, 1977. Solid biography and critical reading. The author says that "sleep frees the fancy from the control of reason, and thus projects it into a dangerously undisciplined world. Dreams are, to Crabbe, a release of the mind's moral sensibility." Covers personal dreams and their artistic use.


Mentions many examples of the dream element in Renaissance and Metaphysical poets.


Excellent general introduction to the dream in Western literature and, specifically, the 17th Century. Includes chapters: “Major Theories of the Dream from Homer to Hobbes,” “Typical Uses of the Dream in Western Literature,” “Dream Visions in Seventeenth-Century English Literature,” and chapters on the dream in Milton and 17th Century lyric poetry, drama, and narrative. Includes useful bibliography.


**9th CENTURY**


Includes brief bibliography, extensive notes.


Includes bibliography.


Coleridge’s dream poem in light of Freud and Silberer.


Includes bibliography.


Recent critical study of French symbolist, whose personal and artistic interest in dream and drug-induced states is well known.


Recent biography. Examines Blake’s visions and the poetry. Bibliography.


Sees Baudelaire’s poem as dream brought on artificially by “stupifejions.”


Classic study of William Blake.


Broad sketch, including remarks on Shelley’s dreams and visions.


Examines the effect of opium upon the imagination, both in theory and in practice. Covers opium experience in such writers as Crabbe, Coleridge, DeQuincey, Collins, Francis Thompson, and Keats. Includes a chapter on Romantic attitudes towards dreams and creativity.


Examines the relationship between Blake’s visions and Milton.


Discusses appeal of the dream vision to Shelley, particularly in relation to Alastor.
Examines movement in Tennyson's poems from the need for verifiable knowledge towards the acceptance of a dream-state as a source of wisdom.

Sees Coleridge's poem as the result of opium-reinforced elation in a manic-depressive. Followed by brief “Comment” on the article by Mabel Worthington.

Numerous references to dreams.

Covers narcissistic daydreaming and "paranoic fantasy" (Freud) in Swinburne's "The Triumph of Time" and other poems.

Classic account of the development of Coleridge's imagination and art.

Psychoanalytic look at Coleridge's ode, with attention given to the dark dream from which the poet turns in horror.

Extended reading of Coleridge's poem. Includes remarks on scholarly background and extensive bibliography of "Christabel" criticism.


Discusses Wordsworth's Dream of the Arab as projection of the poet's own mind.

Psychoanalytic reading that at times closely examines the relationship between Blake's dream-visions and his poetry. Bibliography.

A reading of Coleridge's dream-poem, "Kubla Khan," in light of recurrent imagery in the poet's other work.

Ware, J. Garth. “Coleridge’s Great Poems Reflecting the Mother Imago.” American Imago XVIII, #4, pp. 331-52.

20th CENTURY

Among other things, Yeats was a renowned Blake scholar. Examines the thematic and aesthetic relationship between the two poets whose work was so heavily affected by visions and dreams.

Examines frustration of dream persona, Horace.

Classic study, containing much on the relationship of dream, occultism, and theosophy to Yeats's poetry. Yeats said that "dreams are an existence and not a thought, and make our world of the tea-tables seem but a shabby penumbra."

Discusses the relationship between dream and myth in the poetry of Aiken, Auden, Eliot, Graves, Lowell, Muir, and Yeats.

JOHN D. ENGLE
Review of Galway Kinnell's The Book of Nightmares.
A collection of essays on such topics as Yeats's unpublished occult papers, his relationship to Jung, and his knowledge of spiritualism and psychological research.
Volume of long poems, with useful introduction by Norman Holmes Pearson, commenting on, among other things, the dream-fantasy structure of the poetry.
Studies of the poets within the context of myth, folklore, and dreams.
Psychological, personal narrative concerned with the creative process. Includes a number of personal dreams, interesting with regard to Nemerov’s poetry.
Examines Plath’s work in light of Freud on dreams and wish-fulfillment.
Recent study of the Scottish poet. Like Kafka, whom he translated, Muir was obsessed by dreams. The main influence upon his work: memories of being moved to tears as powerfully vivid dreams and visions. Contains excellent review of earlier criticism.
Williams felt that dream was "a vehicle whereby to lift fact into symbol." Explores this view and its relationship to the method and structure of Paterson.
Includes chapters on “Yeats’s Debt to William Blake” and “Traditional Symbolism in ‘Kubla Khan,” as well as essays on Edwin Muir, St. John Perse, and other poets.
Looks closely at “The Wanderings of Oisin” as well as other poems.
Compact study of the Irish poet who, particularly in his early work, sees dreams and poetry as intimately related: both arise from mental conflict and attempt to resolve that conflict.
Berryman from 77 Dream Songs: “Many opinions and errors in the Songs are to be referred not to the character Henry, still less to the author, but to the title of the work.” Examines relationship of poetry to dream in Berryman’s The Dream Songs and in his criticism.
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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Back cover: "Dolphin" by Julie Macdonald, Persian Onyx, 5' long: "During the making of a sculpture, I inevitably come to the point of not knowing what part to carve next. A total standstill. But with one to five or six nights' sleep, and dreams, the answer presents itself. I've learned to trust my dreams."