NIGHTMARES

As the most memorable and universally experienced dream, nightmare merits first attention in our annual genre series. In future years the series will feature such categories as flying dreams, children's dreams, erotic dreams, and apocalyptic dreams and will explore the general subject of dream genres.

Since the first classic definition of nightmare in English, that of J. Bond's Essay on the Incubus or Nightmare (1763), most authorities have agreed on three characteristics of the nightmare dream; as noted by R. H. Robbins: 1) "terrible and indescribable fear"; 2) "a feeling of heavy weight on the chest which interferes with breathing"; and 3) "a feeling of complete helplessness in the face of these terrors." Although the nightmare is accompanied by definite physiological manifestations, often including awakening the sleeper, it is distinguished from the "night terror"—which occurs more frequently in children than in adults and is more violent in its physical aspects. Whereas the night terror is only vaguely remembered, the nightmare is vividly recalled.

The nightmare occurs at all ages. As John Spaulding points out in his essay on the dream in other cultures, definitions of nightmare are based on the emotional aspect of the dream rather than on its content (i.e., falling dreams and flying dreams can also be nightmares).

Goya's famous drawing on our cover, Caprichos 43 (in the Prado), states, "The sleep of reason produces monsters." Art historians cite the Caprichos series, etched in the years 1797-98, as one of the sources of modern art. Goya originally conceived the series as Señuos, an ancient satirical device through which an author could indict social evils freely—since his criticisms could be dismissed as "only a dream." Goya's own description of a preparatory drawing for Caprichos 43 reads: "The author dreaming. His one intention is to banish harmful beliefs commonly held, and with this work of caprichos to perpetuate the solid testimony of truth." Goya recognized the nightmare as a crucial reflection of the order and disorder of human experience.

Nightmares vary in intensity from dreamer to dreamer, but the strength of imagination they express and generate is evident in this issue's diversity of adaptations, commentaries, essays, and reports.

Kenneth John Atchity
DREAM GENRES

Although everyone working with dreams divides them into categories, the basis of the divisions vary widely, depending on the discipline, methodology, and goals of the classifier. For example, psychologists stress content analysis or emotional affect, neurophysiologists make distinctions on the basis of the physiological state in which the mental activity occurs, anthropologists emphasize the impact on the waking life of the culture, and artists invent personal categories based on style or on their success in adapting dream images to waking media.

As a journal concerned with the relationship between dream and the waking arts, Dreamworks will emphasize an aesthetic approach to this process of categorization. In introducing the concept of Dream Genres, this issue invites the application of genre theory to the phenomenon of dreams. Frequently in the past, when a new medium has been introduced into the discourse about genre, the existing forms have had to be redefined. For example, the novel led to a redefinition of earlier literary genres from which it sprang—the epic, romance, and drama; the invention of photography caused a redirection of painting; and the rise of cinema eventually forced a re-examination of all the arts with which it could be compared—fiction, theater, poetry, music, and dance.

The entry of dreams into the discourse on genre promises to have a great impact because dreams have a fundamental connection with all other art forms, because it predates and thus has had a parallel history with all other media, and because it is not restricted to an aesthetic context. Dream is also perceived as a physiological process and a royal road to the unconscious, as a source of personal and cultural transformation, as a means of spiritual communication with ghosts and gods, as a preprogrammed or random biological printout, and as an evolutionary mechanism that helps design the future of the individual and the species. An exploration of dream categories from all of these contexts may illuminate not only dreams, but also the human process of discovering or creating categories. Since dream content is not usually controlled by the conscious mind, one would tend to identify categorization with the process of interpretation. Yet categorizing may prove to be an unconscious process that occurs during dream production and that is linked with genetic or cultural coding. If two stages exist, then their precise relationship needs to be explored and it might illuminate the creation of genres in all the waking arts. Dreamworks is based on the assumption that this kind of cross-fertilization will generate innovative thinking.

Marsha Kinder