

Perchance to Dream

Literary Club Paper

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Besides our conscious life, each of us has an unconscious life. It is the life of dreams. The dream-life is our secret life, which no one knows: it is secret even from ourselves. How can we predict what dreams may come while we are sleeping, or even that we will dream at all? Yet how real a dream can seem when we wake up from it, not a fantasy but a reality. Only when we are fully awake can we be sure we have been dreaming, lost in a fantasy world which we knew was not, when we suddenly awoke from it, the familiar world we inhabit when we are awake.

We fall asleep every night, but how often do we dream? We'll never know. All we know is that sometimes we wake from a sound sleep, suddenly aware that we have been living in another world. We spend a third of our lives sleeping; we can only guess how much of our lives we spend in dreaming. Dreams do not come every night, but they come often enough to seem a normal part of our lives. Why do we dream? From a secret wish to live in another world, or simply to exercise our brain as we sleep? There is one thing we do know: we can neither choose to dream, nor refuse to dream. Dreams occur spontaneously. If a good night's sleep is refreshing; a dream can add to the pleasure of waking up. Even a nightmare can be pleasing, because of the huge relief we feel, to awake and realize we were only dreaming. Waking from a pleasant dream is to wish that it would go on, giving us time to wonder where it came from and what it might mean, delaying the inevitable return to real life.

But life itself is not a dream, nor can we go on dreaming forever. Consciousness returns as soon as we awake. Sleep has released us from the domination of our reason and our will, which we surrendered willingly, content to leave the outside world for a night. We enter a dark

world when we sleep, but dreams can illuminate it. They give us images of the world we know, the world we live in every day, in a different setting. Dreams are illusory and fleeting, yet they seem to follow some kind of narrative pattern. No matter how short a dream may be, it has the makings of a story, with a plot we unconsciously invent.

I can speak about dreams with some confidence, because for a quarter of a century I have made the effort to write down every dream as soon as I wake up from it. The effort is only partly successful, because some dreams fade too quickly to be written down, but during the last three decades of my life, I have recorded more than 1500 dreams, in words that fill nearly 500 pages of typescript. It is a challenge to read them consecutively; I have done so only once, and that was to write this paper. My dream log has accumulated slowly, because I have only minutes to keep a dream from disappearing forever down the memory hole. If something distracts me, if I wait too long to put it into words, the dream is gone. It seemed real only for the instant before I wrote it down. If I look at my transcript later, in the cold light of day, I see how irrational the dream was, though at the time I was dreaming it seemed perfectly plausible. I am talking about night dreams, of course, which come effortlessly while I am sleeping, not about daydreams which come consciously, when I am half awake. Night dreams are not governed by reason and will; they come from the power of the imagination, rearranging and reshaping memories stored in the mind. We are unconscious while we sleep, but our minds may be active, busy weaving a credible story from the storehouse of our memory.

When I wake from a dream, I know it came straight out of my own experience; but where or when I do not know. It gives me images of past events and the faces of people I have known, yesterday or long ago. I try to make my unconscious conscious by writing it down. Doing so has taught me that I dream much more often than I thought. Dreams do not exist outside the mind of

the dreamer. Some nights I remember only a single dream; other nights I recall multiple dreams, sometimes connected, sometimes not. I try to put the dream sequence into words before the images disappear from my memory, as they too often do. Sometimes I use mnemonic tricks to keep the dream alive, forming acronyms to identify the images by letters of the alphabet. Sometimes a forgotten dream is brought back to mind by sights, sounds, tastes, or smells encountered later in the day. Telling a dream to another person can prolong it for a while, but putting dreams into words is the only sure method of preserving them. I have forgotten many more dreams than I have recorded, but trying to recover a lost dream is futile. There is no use regretting it, for new dreams are bound to come. My consolation is that I have saved lots of dreams from disappearing forever.

It is easier to forget dreams than to remember them. The dream life is private, vivid while it lasts, fascinating to the dreamer but seldom to anyone else. Just try recounting a dream to someone you know, for instance your wife. You may be disappointed to discover she isn't interested--unless of course, she happened to be in the dream herself. I can honestly say that my wife is by far the most frequent visitor in my dreams, and I sometimes surprise her by telling her the improbable things she has been doing in my dreams. I have filled hundreds of pages with improbable adventures that are of interest to me because I dreamed them, but of little interest to anyone else (including my wife). What dreams prove is that we all have the power of imagination, which can be active when we aren't. They also prove that in dreams, memory is as essential as imagination, for dreams may range through the whole course of a life--nine decades in my case--reminding us of people we once knew and will never see again. I often dream about people who are dead, but such dreams are never sad. In dreams, no one ever dies; our memories won't let them.

Recording my dreams has made me aware how rich the storehouse of memory is, for by dreaming I am able to restore the forgotten past. The French novelist Marcel Proust was a master of the creative use of memory. He wrote seven consecutive novels by remembering his own life, partly helped by his dreams. "If a little dreaming is dangerous," he once wrote, "the cure for it is not to dream less but to dream more, to dream all the time." It was his good fortune to live in Paris and other charming places in France before and after the turn of the twentieth century, and he made his memories into a fictional continuum, which he called *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* (literally, "In Search of Lost Time," however, the best translation of Proust into English, by C.K. Scott Moncrief, took its title from one of Shakespeare's sonnets, *Remembrance of Things Past*). Proust's sequence of seven novels is a landmark in world literature. He was able to fictionalize the characters, scenes, and events of his own life, starting with the touchstone of a remembered taste. It was the delicious flavor of a madeleine biscuit dipped in limeflower tea, offered to him by his aunt when he was a child, that awakened in his later mind childhood memories of falling asleep under the comforting gaze of his mother. An early memory led to a whole train of memories, enabling him to fictionalize his entire existence, immortalizing a whole epoch of French history, La Belle Epoque, "the beautiful epoch," as the French call it, of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Proust's dreams of the past had been stored in his memory; the power of his words gave them universal meaning.

Dreams have been a mother lode for many writers. The greatest writers have produced the kind of exalted dreams we call visions, which seem to come from some supernatural source. The myths of ancient Greece may well have started as dreams, out of which Homer fashioned the great epics of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, the founding works of Western Literature. Coleridge would one day call these visionary dreams the work of the Primary Imagination. He called one

of his finest poems, *Kublai Khan*, “A Vision in a Dream.” It is a brilliant short poem. Coleridge said it would have been a longer poem, if a “person on business from Porlock” hadn’t knocked on his door and waked him up, leaving him only a glittering fragment of his visionary dream.

Heaven and Hell are dream visions of such commanding scope and magnificence that we believe them to be real, when we read them in the Bible, or in *The Divine Comedy* of Dante, or in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* or in William Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. The visionary tradition has been extended by great modern writers like James Joyce and William Faulkner, who gave them ironic twists in their novels and stories. Joyce’s masterpiece, *Ulysses*, transformed Homer’s *Odyssey*, the mythical journey of Ulysses from Troy to Ithaca on his way back from the Trojan War, into an interior monologue set in his native Dublin, following satirically, episode by episode, the thoughts in the minds of three Irish characters, Stephen Dedalus, Leopold and Molly Bloom, the improbable reincarnations of Telemachus, Odysseus, and Penelope, as they move about the real Irish city. Joyce’s last work, *Finnegan’s Wake*, has puzzled readers for a century, and can only be grasped as an extended dream, impossible to read consecutively because it is dreamlike and illogical and loaded with multilingual puns, yet full of quotable passages that make startling sense. Joyce’s master stroke was to make the beginning and ending of *Finnegan’s Wake* complete a broken sentence. The final words “ a way a lone a last a loved a long the” connect with the beginning words, “riverrun past Eve and Adam’s, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodious vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs.” The reader who knows that Eve and Adam’s is the nickname of a real Church of the Immaculate Conception on the bank of the River Liffey in downtown Dublin, and that Howth Castle is the principal landmark on the north side of Dublin Bay, can see that Joyce’s apparent nonsense does make geographic sense, and thus realize that the whole novel was

ingeniously conceived to have no beginning or end, turning back on itself like a dream sequence endlessly repeated. Faulkner wrote a novel called *The Hamlet* about a country village in Mississippi dominated by a rustic con man named Flem Snopes, who profits by cleverly robbing the gullible citizens of Yoknapatawpha County, and who is so good at cheating his fellow men that the narrator, whose name is Ratliff, imagines he will cheat the Devil himself when he is sent to Hell, because he has no soul to be punished like other condemned sinners. Faulkner also wrote an entirely visionary dream in a short story he called "Carcassonne," named for the real, elaborately castled French village which in his rhapsodic imagination is somewhere beyond experience, a dying man's dream of life, in an interior monologue that begins "*me on a buckskin pony with eyes like blue electricity and a mane like tangled fire, galloping up the hill and right off into the high heaven of the world.*" In Faulkner's wild imagination heaven may come by dreaming our way into death, on the wings of the imagination.

From the earliest times, men have speculated on the source and meaning of dreams. Aristotle wrote a treatise on dreams which held that dreams were extensions of sense experience into sleep, and that dreams could sometimes seem prophetic by coincidence, if not otherwise. The belief that dreams could be truly prophetic goes back even farther than Aristotle, to the dream of Jacob in the Old Testament., where we are told that Jacob dreamed of winning favor with God and founding a human dynasty. In the 28th chapter of the Book of Genesis we read that Jacob was wandering in the desert and lay down to sleep on a pillow of stone:

"And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, *I am* the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed;

And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

Jacob's visionary dream may be the oldest recorded dream, since it was set down only a few generations after the creation of man, if we trust the Biblical account. It was clearly prophetic of the fulfilment of Jacob's gift from God. And a little later, in the 37th chapter of Genesis, we read that Jacob's son Joseph had a similar dream. He dreamed of being especially favored by God, and when he told his dream to his brothers, they became so jealous they sold him into slavery in Egypt. Thus Joseph's dream brought him initial misfortune, but he was rescued by means of another dream, for God gave him the ability to interpret the dreams of others, bringing him good fortune in the end. For while Joseph was still in captivity in Egypt, the ruler Pharaoh had a dream, which none of his Egyptian counselors could interpret, and so he turned to Joseph for help. In the 41st chapter of Genesis we read:

“Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they brought him hastily out of the dungeon...

And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I have dreamed a dream, and *there is* none that can interpret it: and I have heard say of thee, *that* thou canst understand a dream to interpret it.

And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, *It is* not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.

And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, In my dream, behold, I stood upon the bank of the river:

And, behold, there came up out of the river seven kine, fatfleshed and well favoured; and they fed in a meadow:

And, behold, seven other kine came up after them, poor and very ill favoured and leanfleshed, such as I never saw in all the land of Egypt for badness:

And the lean and the ill favoured kine did eat up the first seven fat kine...

And Joseph said unto Pharaoh,.. God hath shewed Pharaoh what he *is* about to do. The seven good kine *are* seven years

And the seven thin and ill favoured kine that came up after them *are* seven years...

Behold, there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt:

And there shall arise after them seven years of famine; and all the plenty shall be forgotten in the land of Egypt; and the famine shall consume the land.”

Pharaoh believed Joseph's interpretation of his dream to be true, and promptly commanded his overseers to make sure that in the seven years of plenty, stores of food would be set aside to prepare for the seven years of famine, and they obeyed his command. Thus Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream saved the Egyptian kingdom from famine, and Joseph, who had been sold into slavery, rose to become the chief counselor to the Egyptian ruler.

The New Testament as well as the Old Testament bears witness to the power of dreams. We read in the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, "I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I cannot tell: or whether out of the body I cannot tell: God knoweth) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body I cannot tell, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." St. Paul was dreaming of life after death, a pillar of Christian faith. That dream is extended greatly in the last book of the Bible, which prophesies the end of time, the Apocalypse, or "Revelation of St. John the Divine," an elaborate vision of Heaven and Hell. In Chapter Four St. John describes a spiritual world that transcends the world of men: "After this I looked, and behold, a door was opened in heaven, and the first voice I heard was as it were a trumpet talking with me, which said: Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter. And immediately I was in the spirit: and behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne." St. John's dream-vision has been dramatized by master painters such as Tintoretto and Veronese and Memling, who were inspired by his words to make the invisible world visible to human eyes.

In Homer's Classical Greek epics, dreams are often treated as prophetic messages from the gods. In the *Odyssey*, for instance, the patient Penelope, wife of Ulysses, waits ten years for her

husband to come back from the Trojan War, while suitors beg her to marry one of them in her husband's absence. But ten years after Ulysses left his island kingdom of Ithaca to lead the Greeks in their battle against the Trojans, he returns to his palace disguised as a beggar so that the suitors will not recognize him. Penelope herself does not recognize him, but before she retires for the night in her palace, she recounts to Ulysses a powerful dream she had the previous night, in which she saw an eagle swoop down upon her twenty pet geese and kill them all; it then perched on her roof and, in a human voice, said that her husband would put all her suitors to death. Penelope asks Ulysses to tell her what it might mean. Rising to the challenge, Ulysses explains that the eagle is her husband, and the twenty pet geese are her suitors. She has dreamed prophetically that her husband will return and kill the suitors. Sure enough, early the next day, helped by his son Telemachus, Ulysses disarms the sleeping suitors and slays them all. Penelope's warning dream was sent by the goddess Athena, protector of Ulysses throughout his arduous ten-year journey to and from Troy. Thus, it was with the aid of a prophetic dream that Ulysses rescued his wife and reclaimed his kingdom.

In our age, the most famous interpreters of dreams have not been philosophers or poets but psychiatrists. Sigmund Freud wrote *The Interpretation of Dreams* to explain his theory that dreams could reveal the causes of mental illness. He maintained that dreams were unconscious wishes, and that mental illness could be cured by the proper scientific analysis of dreams, exposing the hidden guilt of those who suffered from nervous breakdowns or severe depression. Freud was the chief advocate of psychoanalysis to cure mental problems, and his most famous theory was based on a Greek myth. He called his theory the Oedipus Complex. It held that all men are born with a desire to murder their father and marry their mother, and in extreme cases their buried guilt is expressed in telltale dreams. He based his theory on the Greek myth that Oedipus, King of

Thebes, unwittingly killed his father and married his mother, making him the cause of all the troubles that Thebans suffered under his rule. The theory, taken seriously by some but ridiculed by others, had considerable influence for a time, and Freud claimed that he had healed mentally ill patients by use of it. It is largely discredited now, but the Irish storyteller Frank O'Connor wrote a hilarious story called "My Oedipus Complex," in which the narrator is a little boy who imagines he will kill his father and marry his mother, just as Freud said he should. Fortunately, he learns that he was only dreaming, and would never commit the horrible crimes he conjured up in his childish mind. But Freud was serious about his theory, even going so far as to suggest that Hamlet suffered from a repressed Oedipus complex, a way of accounting for Hamlet's strange reluctance to avenge his father's murder by his uncle Claudius, and Freudian literary critics were quick to agree with him. Hamlet did finally kill his uncle in revenge for the crimes of murdering his father and marrying his mother, but he himself was killed by Laertes, in revenge for Hamlet's killing of his father, Polonius. In the Greek myth dramatized by Sophocles, Oedipus did kill his father and marry his mother, but he did so unwittingly; his tragedy was that when he discovered his crimes he felt so guilty he blinded himself and went into exile. *Oedipus Rex* and *Hamlet* are both great tragic dramas, but to say that Sophocles and Shakespeare were exemplifying Freud's theory of the Oedipus Complex is, to say the least, oversimplification. Oedipus and Hamlet are alike in being great tragic heroes, and the guilt they suffer produces what Aristotle called the cathartic effect of tragedy: the audience, sympathizing with the hero's guilt and punishment, can witness them dramatically, without having to suffer the hero's agony or his fate.

Shakespeare did of course make much of dreams. From his early comedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, to his last comedy, *The Tempest*, he mixed fantasy and myth in plays that have timeless appeal, and in his tragedies dreams acquire even greater significance. It is in the *Tragedy*

of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark that his most introspective and eloquent tragic hero links life and death to dreams, especially in Hamlet's often quoted soliloquy:

To be or not to be; that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
and by opposing end them? To die; to sleep:
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause

My own dreams bear no such universal meaning, but they do have personal meaning for me. To make some sense of the more than 1500 dreams I have written down in the last quarter of a century of my life, it helps to classify them, for though they are peculiarly mine, in their variety they might stand for anyone's dreams. In my dream log there are sad dreams and happy dreams, frightening dreams and uplifting dreams, a few prophetic dreams, some truthful dreams, and many puzzling dreams. They range in mood from very light to fairly heavy, and wish fulfillment dreams occur often, as no doubt would be echoed in anyone's dreams,.

The most convincing explanation for dreams is that they are an unconscious ordering of our memories, linking people and events from different moments of our lives, fashioning them into narratives which connect them as they were never connected in life. Dreams mirror our experience, not as we remember it but as we imagine it while we sleep. Thus dreams may give

new life to our memories, associating them in unexpected ways, helping us recall old friends, or create new adventures from forgotten happenings.

When I read my dreams over, I see that few make realistic sense, even if they form a narrative pattern. But if by dreaming I can produce unconscious short stories with fantastic plots, there is some purpose in my dreaming. I can see historical meaning, for instance, in one of my more elaborate dreams, though the events could never actually have happened. I must have been unconsciously recreating the past by incorporating myself into it, as though I were traveling in a time-machine. I wrote down this vivid historical dream in detail, exactly as I remembered it, recognizing images from recent exhibits I had seen and picturing my life as if I had been born in a much earlier age:

DREAM OF MEDIEVAL WARFARE

On the last night of a visit to France, (it was August 25, 1995; I always record the date of a dream) I woke up in a room of the Orly Airport Hilton hotel, with a dream in my mind that I had been fighting a medieval battle, besieging a town and fortress somewhere in that country. I was wearing chain mail and riding horseback at the head of a troop of warriors, assaulting a small town where we easily conquered the unarmed citizens, but just as we were congratulating ourselves on our victory, a messenger came riding up with word that warriors from the castle had recaptured the town. I saw my Irish friend Iain Pratt clad in armor, with blood on his face, coming to announce that we had lost the town and would have to attack the castle, a fortress that looked very much like Luxembourg, (where our family had lived for a semester). I pictured the scene in my dream as a stone edifice high on a hill. I was putting on my armor again to follow Iain in attacking the fortress, when I suddenly woke up with a feeling of great relief. I realized that what I had been doing was making up a narrative out of scenes from earlier visits to Luxembourg and France, during which I had climbed up to the ruined fort of Montségur, one of the lofty Cathar castles in the south of France, and had also visited the Musée d'Armée and the tomb of Napoleon in the Hotel des Invalides in Paris, and had viewed a gun exhibit and model castles in the Luxembourg Museum the day before we left the grand duchy. All these memories congregated in my dream of being in a medieval battle fighting for my life. Waking up from it assured me the battle hadn't been lost.

A year later, I recorded another historical dream, this time closer to home, about the Battle of Ticonderoga during the American Revolution. It too stemmed from a trip we had taken, this time to Vermont to visit our son. We had stopped at Fort Ticonderoga to take the ferry across Lake Champlain and we were given a guided tour of the fort while we waited. In my dream, I became an officer in the American army, fighting against the British, imaginatively participating in history, at a different date in a different war. Here is how I recalled that dream:

DREAM OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Early in the morning of Dec. 10, 1996, I awoke with a dream vividly in mind: I was an officer in the American Revolutionary War, with a troop of men waiting in the log enclosure of Fort Ticonderoga on Lake Champlain, for the British to launch a bombardment against us. I watched as an explosion lit up the Adirondack Mountains and then saw a fireball heading our way. I yelled "It's coming for us!" and we all ducked down. The shell exploded behind us in the stockade but didn't kill anyone in our vicinity, and so we crouched in front of the logs and waited for the next shell to be fired our way. I woke with relief to see that I had once more escaped death in battle and felt no pain from any wounds suffered in combat.

I have participated in a number of wars and battles in my dreams, as I have never done in real life, so my dream life has been much more violent than my real life, an indication I guess that the unconscious mind can be more bloodthirsty than the conscious mind. I have had more than one dream about the Civil War, in which I always fought on the side of the Confederacy, just as my great-grandfather, Henry Lucius Pratt, did. He survived to lead a normal life in Houston, Mississippi, after the war ended, but in it he had been a medical orderly in a brigade of the Army of Northern Mississippi under the command of General Nathan Bedford Forrest.

DREAM OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

I dreamed once that I was playing the part of an aide to General Nathan Bedford Forrest at the end of the Civil War, dressed in the grey officer's uniform of the Confederacy. A junior officer came in to the office where we were sitting to report that another battle was about to start, and although Gen. Forrest was badly wounded, he summoned up all his strength and with the help of his aides,

including me, he rose to his feet and we marched out to battle one last time, to the cheers of the other Confederates around us. It was all imaginary, but it was one more Civil War dream in which I was fighting on the Rebel side, my ancestral family side, as I have been in all such dreams. Although I fought on the losing side in that war, I could never dream of fighting on the winning side.

I have had a few fairly creative dreams, in which as a veteran birdwatcher I invented new and non-existent birds, naming one of them the Heath (there was once a Heath Hen, but it is now extinct) and another the Spuriel Pile, which never existed, but which I imagined as a Meadowlark with a large black spot on its breast. I also dreamed of seeing a black and white duck and exclaiming “ There goes a goon!,” another non-existent bird, and once I had a prophetic dream of seeing a rare bird in my dream that I later saw in fact. It was my first sighting of a Ruffed Grouse, so this time my dream came true. My hobby of birdwatching had no doubt spurred me, even unconsciously, to be on the lookout for rare birds I have never seen. I keep a long list of the birds I have never seen, and in my dreams I sometimes project images of new birds I can easily spot in my mind’s eye, though it wouldn’t be cricket to add them to my lifelist. My wife has assured me I am not alone in inventing non-existent creatures. She confessed she once dreamed of owning a mechanical bunny, which would wiggle its nose and hop when she set it down. I did not limit my inventions to birds, for I recorded some new dishes for the table that could never have been cooked, much less eaten. The most inedible of my cooking dreams featured as its main course Rattlesnake Pudding, which I envisioned as a casserole containing a nest of rattlesnakes baked in a cream sauce, but the snakes were not dead: they kept on wriggling and raising their heads when I tried to serve the dish to startled guests at the dinner table.

I have had many dreams of sporting contests, imagining myself engaged in one of my favorite sports, especially playing golf. I have dreamed a whole raft of fanciful golf games, even

after I grew too old to swing a club with any accuracy. The games I dreamed of usually involved impossible lies in formidable rough, probably arising from unsuccessful efforts to break par during my active golfing years. I remember laughing out loud as I read over one such dream, which I had recorded much earlier in my life:

FANTASTIC GOLFING DREAM

I dreamed on the night of Feb. 10, 1996, that I was playing golf (as I did in Dreams number 46, 85, 134, 200, 205, 238, 293, 301 and 348) from the bottom of a gully, and was teeing off into the trees and rocks, ending up with an unplayable lie. When I looked for my ball, it turned out to be a large striped rubber child's ball rather than a golf ball, and the best I could do was to hit it down into a deep stream bed, which resembled the draw below our house in Oxford. I searched for my ball among the roots; when I found it, I discovered I would have to drive it over a wall that was ten feet high, and then across a stream. I did not succeed; instead, I watched in amazement as it bounced out of bounds and along the street through a city bordering the golf course. I followed its path into the open door of a café where it lodged beneath a pile of coats. The sign on the cafe window read "Self Service." There was no other name on the restaurant, but the booths were full of people eating, who stopped eating and stared at me as I retrieved my big rubber ball from under the coatpile. I quickly picked it up and walked out of the door—just as I waked up from my crazy golfing dream!

I had other dreams about golf with fantastic settings and extravagant shots, one of which was recorded on the morning of June 25, 1998, when we were traveling in Tennessee, on our way from Nashville to a Fourth of July picnic at Monteagle, our second home, where I sometimes played golf at the nearby course on the campus of the University of the South at Sewanee. I'm never sure what course I am playing in my dream, but this was a happy dream of playing with some expert golfers and doing my best to keep up with them. In the dream, my score was even par for the first 14 holes, which meant I was playing the best game of my life. I made one bogey but matched it with a birdie and parred the other holes, including the final 14th hole (I never played the rest of the 18 holes in my dream). I was able to describe my last putt at some length. I had about 6 feet left to make par, and I saw it was a makeable putt, so I calmly proceeded to chip a large green apple into the cup!

The apple was the shape of a red delicious apple but the color was as green as a Granny Smith. The apple wedged at the top of the cup and wouldn't fall, but I had made a credible putt, and my fellow golfers stood amazed to see what I had done. I smiled as I told them, "That makes me even par for 14 holes." There my dream fantasy ended.

I have had few real nightmares, but each one has been vivid enough to wake me up in a state of panic, with the sensation that what was happening was real, followed by sudden relief that came from knowing it was only a dream. One such dream was especially scary:

A Beheading Nightmare

In the early morning of Jan. 30, 1997, I woke up from a frightening dream in which I was about to be beheaded. I was on an operating table in a hospital, and the surgeon was preparing his knife to cut off my head, with a bucket at the end to catch the severed body part, but first he gave me a wax model of a severed head to show me what my own head would look like when it fell into the bucket! I smiled and thanked him, then turned around to my wife, who was watching in horror, and took her hand, saying I was sorry it was all over, but my time had finally come. Then in sudden desperation I woke up. How good it felt to be released from a nearly fatal nightmare!

Most of my dreams have been much happier, when I pictured myself receiving gifts, or serving in high offices, or lecturing on subjects about which I knew very little, or altering events to make them more to my liking. One such dream connected current events with past events, improving what had really happened by inventing a preferable outcome. I woke early on Feb. 6, 1998, from a dream of crossing the Vanderbilt campus on the way to class, as I had done regularly forty years earlier. I was expecting to teach the class, but when I got to the classroom, I found to my surprise that it was already being taught by Bill Clinton, who was then President of the United States. In my dream, I went in, saw him in front of the class, and quietly sat down, embarrassed that I had arrived ten minutes after the bell. I watched as Bill Clinton searched in his briefcase for a letter, which he then read aloud in a sad voice, announcing that he was resigning from the presidency because of documented allegations that he had engaged in adulterous acts with an intern in the Oval Office. My

dream was not all fantasy, because he was at that time about to be impeached by the House of Representatives for lying about his affair with a White House intern, the eventual outcome still undetermined. Later, I would learn the true course of events, for when he was asked at a press conference if he considered resigning, President Clinton shouted "Never!" His refusal came on Sept. 15, 1998, eight months after my dream, and it was not until Dec. 12, 1998, ten months later, that Articles of Impeachment were adopted by a majority vote in the House, and Bill Clinton became only the second U.S. President to be impeached. In a few more months, however, the Senate would consider the case, and a majority would vote against convicting him, so despite his scandal and impeachment, he would serve out the rest of his second term as President. I wasn't through with my wish-fulfillment dreams about Clinton, however, for on the morning of Feb. 11, 1998, less than a week later than the first one, I dreamed I saw a newspaper headline which read "CLINTON RESIGNS." A year would go by before a very different outcome came to pass, but I was still hoping my dream would come true, when I dreamed for the second time that Bill Clinton would resign in disgrace from the office of President. My unconscious was trying hard to change real events to suit my conscience, giving me a moment of pleasure rather than pain when I woke up.

Dreams may also be contrary to what we wish. A month later, on March 16, 1998, I dreamed Bill Clinton was exacting his revenge. It was not a wish-fulfillment dream; it was a nightmare: I dreamed I was being slowly tortured to death by President Clinton, who laid me out on a table in an operating room and amputated my foot, which he then carefully compared with the remaining foot, remarking with relish that I was still alive but wouldn't be for long. He was quite calm and seemed to see me as a deserving victim, because I had been critical of his scandalous behavior. Why he took satisfaction in comparing the amputated foot with the live foot was not clear to me, but I dreamed I was wide awake and could see them both, one white and bloodless, the other flesh-colored with blue

veins. I was waiting for the fatal blow to fall that would end my life—but it never came. I woke up with great relief to see that both my feet were intact and I was still in good health!

Nightmares are uncommon in my dream life, but anxiety dreams are very common. My anxiety dreams fall into two main categories: either I am missing trains or planes when I am traveling, or missing classes when I am teaching. On June 28, 2001, I dreamed one of many panicky dreams about missing a class—three years after I had retired from Miami!—when I was frantically trying to get dressed in time to meet a 9 a.m. class. I looked at my watch and saw it was a few minutes before 9 and I knew I was going to be late. I was wearing blue jeans, and wondered if I dared to wear them to class, but when I realized how late it was, I decided to go ahead and try to get to class before it broke up. I skipped breakfast and ignored the blue jeans, but my effort to be on time proved disappointing, because the dream ended before I could leave home, while I was still hoping to get to class on time. It has been two decades since I retired, but the sinking feeling I am about to be late for a class hasn't disappeared, and it must be stored in my unconscious permanently, ready on any night to disrupt my sleep.

Some dreams are part wish-fulfillment and part pure invention, and amuse me when I read them over. I have dreamed many times about T.S. Eliot, one of the major poets whose work I taught for over forty years. One such dream came to me on March 27, 2002, 37 years after his death and 47 years after I had heard him read from his poetry in Washington, the only time I ever saw him in person. In my dream I was meeting him for the first time in his office in London, where he offered me a glass of sherry and told me he had just returned from a round-the-world trip to Hong Kong. He seemed to know I liked the Chinese city as much as he did, and he was kind enough to compliment me on a book of critical essays I had recently published, which included essays on his work. Though he told me he had enjoyed reading it, he said he was no

longer interested in writing poetry and had decided to abandon literature for an export-import business in which he held a partnership (I knew he had once worked in the foreign trade division of Lloyd's of London). Then, miraculously, we got into a spacecraft and shot up into space, with Eliot beside me holding a little baby which he was looking after solicitously. He said he wanted to see more of the space ship, and so he ascended a spiral staircase to the control room, while I climbed a rope up to it, very laboriously. Once we both arrived on the bridge of the spacecraft, he offered me another glass of sherry, but I declined, and then he offered me an English muffin, which I accepted. I asked if he would mind to leave the contents of my next book to me, and let me include one of his essays in it, and he agreed (I had earlier included one of his poems in my Imagist anthology). We quickly returned to earth in our space ship, where he promptly went off on a fishing expedition with a friend, while I made purchases at a sporting goods store nearby, ending of one of the most improbable dreams I have ever dreamed!

I once had another dream that was more serious. It was about Modern Poetry, the main subject of my professional career. I woke up on February 9, 2013, with a dream in my mind about attending a literary conference with people I didn't recognize, with whom I was discussing poetry. A woman at the conference complained that the trouble with Modern Poetry was that it was about literature, not about life. I replied that what she said was true, but that if Modern Poetry was indeed highly literary, it was nevertheless real poetry, and that was what mattered most. I said the source of poetry could just as well be literature as life, and declared that in my judgment Eliot was Eliot as Shakespeare was Shakespeare; both were great poets, but in different ages. I went on to say that Ezra Pound was the signal case of a poet who made poems from other poems, sometimes by translation, sometimes by imitation, but proved once and for all that good poetry can be the source of good poetry. The key to understanding Modern Poetry, I argued,

was perceiving that it built deliberately on past models, often in languages other than English, to produce authentic new poems in English. My dream was serious and truthful, as dreams can sometimes be, and from it I felt I was back in touch with my whole teaching career, half a century of studying, teaching and writing about Modern Poetry. It was a self-justifying dream, conceived unconsciously while I was sleeping. Reflecting on it made me see that dreaming can be verbal; it can be about ideas as well as about images, more philosophical than visual. My serious dream convinced me that sometimes the unconscious mind easily invents arguments that a conscious mind struggles to articulate. Dreams are sometimes truer than our thoughts.

“In dreams begin responsibilities,” Yeats once wrote, a seeming contradiction containing truth. Yeats wrote some of the world’s finest poetry about dreams. One of the best of them is “The Man Who Dreamed of Faeryland” who was Yeats himself. He filled his poems with faeries, leprechauns, elves, mythical Irish warriors and queens, all kinds of imaginary creatures. In one poem he appealed to the woman he loved: “I have laid my dreams under your feet. Tread softly, because you tread on my dreams.” All poets are dreamers, but they are serious dreamers who find wisdom in their dreams. What would life would be without dreams? Imagine living with only the facts. Dreams allow us to open our minds to greater freedom than we enjoy in conscious life. The virtue of dreams is that they are elusive, that we cannot summon them at will. They occur while we are unconscious and they vanish when we become conscious. Waking from a dream can be a moment to cherish, maybe even a moment of truth. As Hawthorne once wrote: “We sometimes congratulate ourselves at the moment of waking from a troubled dream. It may be so the moment after death.” There is only one way to be sure if Hawthorne’s guess was right. The experience of dreaming gives us grounds for hope.