

## **Dream Emotions and Word Beauty: Dreaming into Creative Writing**

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All dreams have energy. Creative writing helps us to reach this dream energy through forming a link between our imagination and the dream. Welcome to this workshop. You don't need to be a great writer to join in with the activities I'll be suggesting; you just need to relax and let your imagination and creativity flow. Writers through the centuries have drawn on symbols to develop allegory and fiction, and dreams are filled with the most marvellous array of symbols. Endowed with emotional meaning, our personal dream images often layer back to memories or associations, and an exploration of these through writing can have transformative results.

I'm a fiction writer and poet who has always drawn on lucid and non-lucid dreaming for inspiration. I'm also a creative writing teacher and a dreamworker. I developed the foundations for this workshop while working on my doctoral thesis, which looked at the role of lucid dreaming in the creative writing process, and I have since worked with similar techniques in workshops and private sessions in England, the US, and Portugal.

For some participants, the exercises are not mind-blowing on any level; they are just a fun way of exploring dream energy. For others, powerful memories can arise and shifts can take place in their way of thinking. It all depends on which dream image you choose to work with, and your own state of readiness. It's important to go into these exercises with a relaxed and open mind, and if something comes up that you do not feel

comfortable with, simply stop and do something different. Dreamwork is a bit like yoga – nothing should ever be forced. Be gentle with yourself.

### **Lucid writing in the writer's trance**



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Rather than focusing on diary-style dream descriptions, where the dream is recorded as a string of actions, we'll be entering what I have termed the 'writer's trance' and taking an element of the dream as a springboard for creative writing. Staying close to the dream imagery is *not* essential here: you are encouraged to go with the flow and be open to any transformation of imagery that might take place in your mind's eye, without forcing the issue.

The writer's trance is a relaxed, meditative state in which one drifts closer to dreaming consciousness while focusing on vivid mental imagery. What we're doing in the writer's trance is mingling our dream imagery with our imagination, sinking as close as we can into our unconscious minds while remaining awake, and letting ideas flow freely and rapidly. When we are deep in the writer's trance, we are in a very similar state to that of lucid dreaming because we are in touch with our unconscious and can shape and direct the visual manifestation of our imagination if we want to, while remaining open to spontaneous manifestations of imagery. Although physiologically awake, the creative writer is drifting towards dreaming consciousness, and so the writer's trance can be considered as a waking variant of a lucid dream. The first draft of my novel, *Breathing in Colour*, was written almost entirely in the writer's trance. It is a wonderfully creative state, and easily accessible by all.

So how do we enter the writer's trance? Simply by relaxing with eyes closed, taking deep, regular breaths, and then focusing strongly on a dream image and remaining

aware as it morphs and flows into something else. We then write rapidly *with barely open eyes*, describing what we see in our mind's eye, or perhaps going somewhere completely different with the writing. The important thing is that this writing remains as unconscious as possible – hence the emphasis on speed – and we do not pause to think about what is being written. At times in the writer's trance, visual images appear with such strength and presence that they can virtually be hallucinated onto the page; all we have to do is describe them. I have termed this technique 'Lucid Writing'.

The idea is to keep moving the pen across the page until the time is up. Some participants find this difficult and I see them pausing for thought, or re-reading what they have written. This undermines the point of the exercise, because such actions take a person out of the unconscious and put them firmly into their critical, conscious mind. The key is simply *not* to stop writing, even if your mind goes totally blank. Just return to the dream image for inspiration. Feel it, smell it, become part of it again, and by the time you've finished writing these impressions, other thoughts or images will have presented themselves. Remember how hard meditation is – the mind virtually never stops moving, thinking, enacting scenes, evoking memories, so unless you've reached the Buddhist state of *samadhi*, there's really no excuse for stopping writing! Observe your dream image, enter into the emotion of it, and you'll be away.

Below I have included a range of possible directions to take while in the writer's trance. It's up to you to decide which you'd like to try. Often, you'll know intuitively which approach to choose for different dreams. First, here's a snippet taken from one of my own lucid writing sessions, with the underlining I subsequently did, to give you an idea of the stream of imagery and unexpected associations that can emerge:

...a blue penguin slipping and sliding on the ice. I move towards it noiselessly, hand outstretched, but now it's vanished and I'm standing alone in a scene of unearthly beauty, hills all around me tinged with purples and greens, glowing shapes of hillocks and dunes. Tastes of vanilla ice cream, the place I go to when I fall asleep. This is the beginning of dreaming. I remember being small, standing in a field and tasting a blade of grass, almost sticky on my tongue, careful it might slice it. Holding the minutest forms of nature and inspecting them close up, that's the dream of childhood, total all-encompassing vision staring at something and making it your own, part of your own weight, body, sensations.

## Emotions and sense perceptions – reaching the beating red heart of the dream



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For all of the exercises in this workshop, you'll want to choose a dream image which is vivid, powerful, or emotionally significant to you. It's much easier to work with one strong, central image which gets to the heart of the dream, rather than attempting to conjure up the whole dream. I'm using the phrase 'dream image' for simplicity's sake, but that doesn't mean the dream stimulus must necessarily be visual. If you heard an amazing sound in a dream, you can work with that. If you experienced a baffling physical sensation, you can work with that, and so on. Dreams are multi-sensory phenomena and any vivid dreamed sensory perception or emotion will do for the purposes of this dreamwork. Once we're in the writer's trance, we will hopefully be generating some form of mental imagery, but this can be inspired by a dreamed sound just as well as by a dreamed image.

We always start these exercises in the same way – with pen and paper to hand, closed eyes, relaxed breathing. Take a few minutes to consciously relax your body and empty your mind before bringing a dream image into your mind's eye. This will deepen the process. Allow the image to grow in clarity, and feel the core emotion it generates. Once you begin writing, do not pause for thought – keep going. Timing the writing using a stopwatch is a helpful trick: you aren't 'allowed' to stop writing until the alarm goes. Write for a minimum of five minutes for each exercise, and if you want to go longer, keep going.

**Recurrent dreams – the transformative power of imagery**

If you are ever troubled by a recurrent dream, it's worth remembering that creative writing can sometimes be the catalyst for dream healing. One workshop participant worked with a recurrent nightmare image he had of being a helpless witness to ships coming in to shore and smashing to pieces on the rocks. Deep in the writer's trance, this scene transformed, and when he read through what he had written, he saw that instead of crashing to pieces, the ships took wing and flew gracefully into a clear sky. The dreamer felt strongly that this was an emotional breakthrough, and when I saw him six months later, he said that his nightmare had not returned.

When working on a nightmare in the writer's trance, be open to allowing the fear and the negative image to transform into something beautiful, or to lighten in colour, become transparent and drift away, no longer of any importance. Try to let this be a largely unconscious process – avoid 'pushing' too hard towards a particular outcome. In general, spontaneous transformation will have a far more powerful and lasting effect.

**Past, present and future selves – dream correspondence**

Creative writing can provide a way of talking to your dream characters... and letting them talk back to you. This can be done just as well with childhood dreams as with dreams of present or future selves. One easy way into this is to focus on your dream character – and their dominant emotion – in the writer's trance and then write a letter from them, in their voice. Become them. Let them speak from the heart. Who are they writing to, and why? When you have finished, write a reply from the recipient. This exercise can be both revealing and surprising.

**Animal magic**

When you focus on the dream image or emotion in the writer's trance, ask it which animal it is. Be prepared for anything! Let that animal's voice flow through your writing – how does it feel to be them? Working with animal energies can help us to better understand our own dream/animal energy and reminds us that shapeshifting is an integral part of the self.

**The power of flying**

Work with the transformative energy of flying by visualising your dream image on a flying carpet. How does it feel to fly like this? Where is the carpet going? What can you see? If people have a situation in their life that they are not happy with, this unhappiness tends to seep into their dreams. Sometimes unpleasant situations can easily be changed in the imagination and on paper, through creative writing, and this can be the first small but significant step to finding the courage to change something in 'real' life.

**The dream poet awakes**

Imagine you have followed the guidelines in this workshop and are now in possession of reams of image-packed, exciting lucid writing. What do we do with this writing we have produced? Sometimes there is nothing more to be done – it can stand alone, facilitating our understanding of a particular situation in our lives. It can help us get to the heart of the dream. It can eliminate a negative thought pattern or a nightmare. But lucid writing can also act as inspiration for art, fiction, or poetry. Take a moment to underline the images or individual words in your writing which speak most strongly to you. Then try writing a short story, or a poem filled with images. Have a look at Kit Wright's beautiful poem:

**The Magic Box**

I will put in the box

the swish of a silk sari on a summer night,  
fire from the nostrils of a Chinese dragon,  
the tip of a tongue touching a tooth.

I will put in the box

a snowman with a rumbling belly  
a sip of the bluest water from Lake Lucerene,  
a leaping spark from an electric fish.

I will put into the box

three violet wishes spoken in Gujarati,  
the last joke of an ancient uncle,  
and the first smile of a baby.

I will put into the box

a fifth season and a black sun,  
a cowboy on a broomstick  
and a witch on a white horse.

My box is fashioned from ice and gold and steel,  
with stars on the lid and secrets in the corners.  
Its hinges are the toe joints of dinosaurs.

I shall surf in my box  
on the great high-rolling breakers of the wild Atlantic,  
then wash ashore on a yellow beach  
the colour of the sun.

Why not follow the format of Wright's poem, perhaps using **The Dream Box** as a title? Poetry can be so easy if you have a template to follow and dream-inspired imagery to put in it, and in this workshop there's no 'wrong way' of writing. So your template is: 'I will put in the box' (x4), followed each time by three things from your lucid writing. These could be emotions, shapes, scents, memories, or objects. Then decide what your box is made of, and what you will do with it. If it's full of negative things, will you bury it, send it to outer space? If you love the things in the box, how will you preserve them? If you run out of images for your poem, just pick a different dream and repeat one of the lucid writing exercises. You'll find there's no end to the amount and richness of imagery your dreaming mind can generate. Do post up your Dream Box poem if you'd like to – I'd love to read it. From my own lucid writing snippet, my dream poem might start something like this:

## The Dream Box

I will put in the box

a blue penguin slipping on ice,  
hills tinged with purples and greens,  
a blade of grass, sticky on my tongue.

I hope to see your lucid writing and your dream poetry posted up very soon! Of course, if you don't fancy following Kit Wright's template, then just send in your own dream poem. Please also feel free to post a favourite word-image, or a paragraph which moved or surprised you, and share your process if you'd like to. I'm happy to answer any questions you might have on dreaming into creative writing, including questions from those of you looking to develop longer creative pieces. This is just the tip of the creative dreaming iceberg. Enjoy your explorations.

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