



## Dreams and the Writer

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**M**Y FIRST DREAM – or aspiration you might say – that had to do with being a writer, occurred very early. Four years old, certainly no more, I decided if I closed my eyes very tight and concentrated hard – harder than anything so far in this world – when I opened them again my dolls, my things, the inanimate objects that surrounded me in my daily existence would have come to life. A whole world there, of my own making. It was a solace in what can only be described as a peculiar childhood, one of isolation in deep country, where the past held sway, the future with all that it might contain of joy and promise was a thing far distant; and the present was something you had to transform by a wild belief in the unstoppable force of the imagination.

The disappointment of inanimate things remaining inanimate has stayed with me, and a pervading sense of failure that if only I'd tried harder it would surely have worked. But the day was saved – and perhaps the night too – by reading poetry, on my own but mostly with my father, who brought a fine drama to Kipling's 'If', an equally fine sense of pathos to Shakespeare's 'Seven Ages of Man' and a dreadful foreboding to life being 'a tale/ told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/ signifying nothing'.

The idea came to me, the dream if you wish, that if I couldn't give life to the things around me, I *could* give existence to the things in my head, by turning them into words on the page, like Kipling, like Shakespeare, like Walter Scott: 'O, young Lochinvar is come out of the west!' Adventure. The world. Excitement. Things happening! I decided I'd rewrite Shakespeare's



*Tempest*. I hadn't read it, but Caliban was all I needed to know: the name was enough, the idea of the island, that storm raging.

I re-formed the play to my own dream-vision, but the lavish production I had envisaged was stymied by the realities of a small market town and adult scepticism.

My next dream – aged thirteen – was to write my own version of *The Waste Land*, which I had read but, true to the lights of T. S. Eliot, had experienced rather than understood. I wrote fifty lines, gave up half way through. It had streams and rock pools and something there at the heart of it, shivering.

But by that time the idea of being a writer had taken hold. It was an inescapable *modus operandi*, a conduit between what was and what might be. My fourth dream, accordingly, was of a long window opening onto a garden with light in it. I'm sitting at a table, looking into the garden. There's a pad and a pencil. The sun is moving over the grass, slowly, slowly. Deep silence.

I sit very often at that window. I'm sitting there now, between words and the void that words have fled from. There's even a convenient storm outside. No sun, though. No dolls. Just rain on the window, Yeats on the bookshelf, and his invitation: 'Tread softly, because you tread on my dreams.'