



## Dreams and the Writer

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**I**NTERMITTENTLY, OVER SEVERAL years, I've kept a dream diary. I write notes as soon as I wake up, otherwise the dream either trails away like smoke or crystallizes into a single image. My current journal has headings for narrative, situation and scenery, the emotions experienced, background life events and interpretation. Although a dream diary can be used as a tool to gain understanding of emotional states or to assist self-healing, as a writer my motives are those of a collector. Dreams can provide material and insights in abundance: startling images, shape-shifting characters and access to hidden memories.

Some images from dreams are incredibly vivid and enduring. Years after the event, I can still conjure the image of a high-sided Jacobean cradle of dark wood, set on bare boards and recall the shock of leaning over it to find it empty. I can see the carvings of strange beasts and dancing bears and the tumbled cover with its red and yellow embroidered flowers and seedpods. One day, when this dream meets a *waking* interest, I'm sure I'll write about it. That cradle still has the power of a powder keg waiting for the right fuse.

Dreams are of particular interest to a fiction writer in that they often have a narrative and these are sometimes fractured by interesting, unpredictable shifts. Also, in looking back over a dream diary recurring themes become apparent. When committing to the time and effort required to write a novel, one has to feel strongly about the theme that is its driving force, so discovering my underlying concerns in this way has been helpful.



The most useful aspect for a writer is perhaps to achieve lucid dreaming. A lucid dream is one in which you're aware that you're dreaming and you're able to direct it. A basic form of this occurs when you return to sleep after waking from a dream and by asking yourself 'What happens next?' are able to pick up exactly where you left off. One method that researchers have used to aid lucid dreaming is the 'Wake up, Back to Bed' method, where you wake two hours before your normal time, stay up for thirty minutes and then return to sleep. I'm still a novice lucid dreamer and have so far only managed to control dreams that recur frequently. One is a dream of a strange setting — a London house built on a green, triangular island surrounded by busy roads. When I dream of the house I recognise that I'm dreaming and say to myself 'Ah, back here again!' I'm able to move around the rooms at will, or to add new rooms but I'm always there on my own. How useful it would be if I could advance beyond this to create and control the inhabitants of the house. Perhaps this time I'll continue keeping my diary, in the hope that growing familiarity with the dream world will eventually result in more lucid dreaming.