



## Dreams and the Writer

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Helen Kelly

**T**HE FIRST TIME SOMEONE told me there was no dialogue in their dreams, I was astonished. I dream in dialogue, pictures too, but lots and lots of dialogue.

I've wondered if musicians dream in melody, photographers in still images, foley artists in disembodied sound.

In *Becoming a Writer*, Dorothea Brande urged fledgling writers to keep notebooks by the side of their beds: not so much to catch the content of their dreams; more to encourage the dream state to flow on, giving access to unconscious, unfiltered, instinctive thought.

The near-dream state is artistically useful. I believe that's why many writers write at the beginning or the end of the day — burning the midnight oil or rising to work at dawn. Sometimes unusual schedules can be used to criticise artists, students, academics. How we organise our days points to lazy, dissipated, anti-social, degenerate natures, according to some. In truth we just need to mine that seam of creativity that we have access to when we're closer to our dreams.

In my daydreams I've been composing dialogue for as long as I can remember. As a child I didn't know that was what I was doing. I thought I was just wasting time.

Now I think I'm essentially a fantasist who's found a way of taking this



apparently negative trait and putting it to work, turning the imaginary into something that can become real. Writing is a way of keeping yourself connected to the world outside your head. It's a way of staying sane, even though you can sometimes wonder who are, when you spend so much time trying to be other people.

I remember being on the bus as a child, and trying to imagine my pale, Irish-descent hand as an Asian person's hand: what it would be like to look down and see darker skin stretched over my knuckles, then turning it over to reveal a milky, coffee-coloured palm underneath. This contrast between the dark and the light, together in one hand, seemed magical to me, beautiful, comforting: an experience I wanted to inhabit. I felt that owning such a hand would tell me something I didn't know.

It was a small thing, a simple difference between my hand and those of the other children travelling home on the bus from school, but the feeling has never left me. Inhabiting difference still seems enticing, thrilling.

Maybe that's why we go through such experimentation in our teens trying to look different, and then different again. As writers, this trying to imagine being another person, dream ourselves into alternative experiences, is key. Sometimes writing can seem self-indulgent, but I like the idea that we live in a world where it's the job of some individuals – actors, writers, directors among them – to dream themselves as another. It's a joy, a responsibility and sometimes, a tough job — but then, somebody's got to do it...