

'Perchance to dream': Sleep and Related Phenomena in English Literature
University of Bristol, 7th May 2014

From Medieval Dream Allegory to the lexical recreation of the subconscious mind in *Finnegans Wake*, literature has often explored the subject of sleep and its related phenomena. This conference aimed to consider the many and diverse representations of sleep within English literature, and to explore the ways in which writers respond to this still largely mysterious biological necessity.

With the internationally renowned Professor Garrett Sullivan giving the plenary speech this conference provided a lively and engaging forum for students from across the world to share their ideas and research on this fascinating topic. Listed below are the abstracts to all the talks given on the day.

Jennifer Moos (University of Saarland)

Nowhere to Sleep in the New Nation? Charles Brockden Brown's Somnambulists

At least two of Charles Brockden Brown's literary works reference sleep already in their titles: The fragment "Somnambulism," first published in 1805, and the novel *Edgar Huntly or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker* (1799). In each case, we encounter protagonists whose sleep is troubled; protagonists who do not find a place to rest at night; protagonists who cannot lie down but who have to restlessly keep on walking; protagonists who even become murderers in their somnambulant condition.

Drawing on Maurice Blanchot's elaboration on the interrelations between sleep, sleepwalking, and place, I will show that Charles Brockden Brown's narratives discuss the parallels between the depth of the troubled human mind and the still largely unexplored 'wilderness' of the North American continent. Brockden Brown's texts exemplify that, for Americans at the turn to the 19th century, innocent or 'unawakened' sleep was not to be found easily.

As I want to show, it is through sleep and sleepwalking that Brockden Brown is able to comment on the condition of his nation: Far from presenting sleep as an unquestioned anthropological constant, Brockden Brown employs the trope of sleepwalking as a marker of 'placelessness.' In his works, sleepwalking thus reflects the political, social, economic, and cultural insecurities and 'disorders' of Brockden Brown's times. His texts, I shall argue, suggest that the United States of America have always been imagining themselves as a 'sleepless nation;' as a nation in which there is no place to sleep and also no place *for* sleep.

Jessica Hanson (University of Bristol)

Transgressive Somnambulism in Stoker's *Dracula*

Stoker's Dracula engages with the concept of somnambulism as a method of exposing the characters of the novel to the threat of potential - and sometimes realised - moral transgression.

Somnambulism frees the body from the constraints of thought, bestowing it with the mobility required to fulfil its own carnal desires, by-passing the morally corrective conscience of the conscious mind. Morally dubious desires, which have been repressed at a conscious level, are given their full and free manifestation in the rampant, unguarded physicality of sleep-walking.

Nineteenth-century conceptualisations of the conscious and unconscious mind, and its respective operations in sleep and trance, permeate Victorian culture in arts and sciences, from the early medical work of Polidori, to the sociological treatise of Gabriel de Tarde. These figures of the relationship between body and mind, and what happens when that relationship dynamic shifts, help inform our reading of Stoker's specific brand of somnambulism. Particularly, the novel raises questions of autonomy and responsibility – to what extent are Stoker's characters accountable for their physical movements whilst asleep? Are they really sheltered from their moral transgressions by the veil of unconsciousness, or is this the manifestation of very real immoral desires within them?

Somnambulism, the transgression of boundaries between wakefulness and sleep, becomes a vehicle for greater social and moral transgressions, forcing us to examine the dynamics between impotent conscience and liberated body. Ultimately, the vulnerability of the characters, and thus the horror of the sleep-walking incidents in the novel, is intrinsically linked to this somnambulistic conceptualisation of the divided individual, sleeping mind at the mercy of their body's unhindered mobility.

Kotaro Murakami (University of Kyoto)

Dickens as a Midnight Rambler: His Insomnia and the Nightmarish Vision in *The Uncommercial Traveller*

Throughout his life, Charles Dickens has taken a deep interest in sleep and insomnia and effectively described them in his novels. For instance, though surrounded by the grotesque merchandises, Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* sleeps peacefully as if she were protected from evil. For Dickens sleep seems to symbolise the innocence of good characters. In contrast, when villains have fallen into predicaments, they sometimes become unable to sleep, which leads them to madness.

Interestingly, Dickens himself suffered from insomnia. In "Night Walks," an essay in *The Uncommercial Traveller*, he reflects that he overcame sleeplessness by walking all night till he became exhausted and sleepy. However, what he sees during the nocturnal

walks takes on such gloomy aspects that it seems difficult to believe that his 'remedy' for insomnia works. Indeed the "amateur houselessness" in this essay is far from the "amateur vagrancy," a phrase in *Sketches by Boz*.

It is often said that Dickens's creative imagination is stimulated by the hallucination provoked when he is in the 'sleep-waking' state. Based on this view, I will pay attention to Dickens's 'sleep-walking' in *The Uncommercial* essays. Restlessness caused by insomnia tends to produce dismal illusion, which makes these essays nightmarish. Analysing them in detail and comparing them with his early essays will illustrate how Dickens vividly represents what he calls "the attraction of repulsion" in his later essays.

Jeri Smith-Cronin (University of Bristol)

'The ravell'd sleeve of care': Insomnia in Macbeth.

An impressive body of early modern vernacular medical literature attests to a contemporary concern about sleep, and these texts help to clarify some of the psychological ramifications of sleeplessness in *Macbeth*. These ramifications are presented through the protagonist's metaphorical murdering of sleep, and in his complicit wife's somnambulism, physiological manifestations of their tainted minds and souls. In addition to the insomnia of its murderous couple, *Macbeth* also enacts the inherent vulnerability of the offstage sleeping sovereign. The offstage sleeping body is vulnerable in a double sense: not only in its heightened capacity for victimisation but also through its potential to attract the Macbeths' susceptible ambitions. By murdering Duncan in his sleep, Macbeth denies himself the essential restorative benefits of sleep and mars the political future of Scotland. In murdering sleep itself, the Macbeths condemn themselves to eternal and unsustainable self-division and wakefulness. For Sullivan, sleep 'represents the ground for biological being – that which binds man to animal – and the condition that must be transcended to be fully, monarchically human'.¹ The Macbeths certainly transcend sleep and biology, but so much so that they learn only how to become monarchically inhuman. In this paper I will examine the sleeplessness of the Macbeths in relation to their sovereign's sleeping body. I argue that Shakespeare presents sleep as both historical and subjective, and accordingly its representations in *Macbeth* can be located within the complex political and medical contexts which underpin the play's inception.

Alessandra Monorchio (University of Bristol)

'A dreaming thing, a fever of thyself': John Keats, Dreams and the Role of Poetry.

The relationship between sleep, dreams and poetry constitutes one of the main leitmotifs of European romantic literature. The activity of dreaming seems to have offered poetry the ideal literary space to explore its own imaginative process: in

¹ Sullivan, *Sleep, Romance and Human Embodiment*, p. 95

England, great examples are constituted by the works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Thomas de Quincey and John Keats.

This association is a theme recurring throughout Keats's production. This paper's purpose is thus to examine it specifically focusing on two texts, *Sleep and Poetry* and *The Fall of Hyperion. A Dream*, in order to understand the ways in which sleep and dreams are used as a literary device to discuss the nature and function of poetry. The comparison of these works, in fact, aims to reveal the process of maturation that led Keats from an idea of poetry seen as an escapist dream from reality and its sorrows, as depicted in *Sleep and Poetry*, towards a concrete, harsh critique of that very point of view in *The Fall*. The latter poem becomes itself the place in which the author seems to complete and also poetically represent this process of 'purgation'; in this sense, the dream as a narrative device becomes the best expedient to exemplify this renewed conception of poetry. Keats achieves a reconfiguration of dreams as a valid means to a deeper perception and understanding of reality as their fundamentally liminal nature allows the individual to go beyond the ordinary rational boundaries delimiting the ego, turning consequently poetry into an active sympathetic experience of others' pain.

Claude Fretz (University of Birmingham)

'O'erwatched': Brutus's Sleeplessness in *Julius Caesar*

My paper investigates sleep and sleeplessness in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, paying particular attention to their effects and their relationship with genre and narrative. It argues that Brutus's inability to sleep in the play assists Shakespeare's deviation from a model of tragedy based on fortune and supernatural intervention or predetermination. Brutus's insomnia helps emphasise human and political agencies as well as the psychophysiological factors and sacrifices involved.

Sleep in this Roman tragedy is significant, because all of the stages of Brutus's life are accompanied by different kinds of sleep or sleeplessness – either political, metaphorical, or literal and physiological. In order to understand the latter in particular, I draw on a variety of Early Modern medical texts, such as Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* and Pomarius's *Enchiridion Medicum*. I also compare Shakespeare's account of Brutus's life with the one in his main source text for this play, North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives*.

Julius Caesar is a chiefly experiential, human, and political tragedy for Brutus, with suffering and political manoeuvring featuring prominently, and sleep is associated with both. For example, Brutus's torment is exacerbated by the symptoms of sleeplessness, ranging from humoral imbalance to hallucination. In the representations of these, the text seems to echo contemporary treatises on the subject. At the same time, for purposes of moral judgement and amplification, the play nonetheless retains a supernatural framework in terms of both narrative and sleep, because Brutus's sleeplessness can be seen as a supernatural retribution for the murder of the sovereign.

Aarabi Thavendrarajah (University of Bristol)

“Do you believe in dreams?” A Study of Women and their Dreams in *The Woman in White* (1859).

In a confused ‘condition’, somewhere between waking and sleeping, Marian Halcombe calls out to Walter Hartright and urges him to come back home from his confinement in Central America. Marian admits to a state of mind where she loses control of her own senses, imposing onto the reader a sensation that thrills and excites as the female protagonist enters into a world unknown and, more excitingly, quite unexplainable. Throughout the novel, Wilkie Collins’s readers have seen in Marian a capability that Victorian culture would have associated with a man; her character, resolution and resources suggest that she is the true heroine of *The Woman in White*. Marian’s dream-state, then, can appear quite confusing to the readers as she loses the self-control and agency that she has, up until now, treasured more than anything else. This paper will explore the generative use of dreaming in female characters and why dreams are present in Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White*: a close look into female narrative agency will allow this exploration. An analysis of dreams, or, as Marian refers to it, ‘a trance’ or ‘daydream’, in the wider context of the novel, will provide an insight to the use of dream episodes in nineteenth-century Victorian literature. Through the dreaming experiences of both Marian Halcombe readers are able to see both a physical and psychological loss of agency. Female narrative agency is crucial to the women in *The Woman in White*, as it allows them a sense of identity and a chance to develop. It is through the dreams that Marian experiences that a noticeable change in agency occurs.

Ana Pinto Leite (University of Lisbon)

The 1831 introduction to *Frankenstein*: Mary Shelley’s dream in light of the Romantic critique of science

Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus, by Mary Shelley, was first published in 1818. In the 1831 version, the author added an introduction, where she explains that the idea for her novel had its origins in a dream.

Frame narratives are common in Romantic literature. However, Shelley’s introduction is more than a mere structural element in this novel: its contents is intimately connected with the main narrative. This is recognizable in the vocabulary used, since it is of a similar kind as in the rest of the novel. Furthermore, it is evident that the concerns expressed in this introduction, regarding the process of writing, parallel those we find in the main part of the novel, regarding the limits of scientific creation.

Shelley’s explanation of the origins of *Frankenstein* is hence to be interpreted in light of the English Romantic critique of science, to which names such as William Blake, William Wordsworth, and Percy Bysshe Shelley are central. This discussion often revolves around the discredit of rationalism as the only valid means of knowing and the emphasis on modes of experience that surpass the rational. These include the

subconscious, accessed in dreams — such as the dream in Mary Shelley's introduction to her novel.

Brian Hicks (King's College London)

'Friends with Benefits: The Distinction between Homosocial and Heterosexual Relationships in Chaucer's *The Parliament of Fowls* and *The Book of the Duchess*'

Geoffrey Chaucer's dream visions *The Parliament of Fowls* and *The Book of the Duchess* are often presented as love stories. However, the homosocial relationships in these dreams are presented in much greater detail than any hetero- or homosexual relationship. The Narrator of both poems acts as a third party observer to the love stories in his dreams and is only concerned with his own love before he begins to slumber. It is in the relationship of mentor and mentee where the Narrator of poems learns the lessons. This suggests that relationships of a plutonic nature can be stronger and more important than those derived from love (in the traditional sense), lust or a combination of the two. By keeping the Narrator out of any nonsocial relationship, Chaucer ensures that the reader will not be caught up in a simple love story. Love is still involved in both of these epic poems, however the attention paid to homosocial relationships suggests that they are necessary for guidance and support when it comes to an intimate relationship, a realization made only in dreams.

Hannah Donovan (University of Bristol)

'I know she re-entered her prison with pain': Lucy Snowe and the Boundaries of Sleep

Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, is a novel acutely concerned with the relationship between the demarcating lines between sanity and insanity, and the interplay between self-control, reason, passion and the imagination. Lucy Snowe often seems poised between wakefulness and sleep, and exists in a liminal, undefined space between the two. As the novel progresses the interplay between these two states of consciousness becomes a pivotal vehicle to allow us to understand the complex psychological shifts Lucy makes. This paper will trace some of these moments of wakeful sleepiness, beginning with the 'waking nightmare' Lucy uses to describe the shadowy childhood we know so little of, to the climactic scenes in volume two in which she wanders, drugged yet unable to sleep, through the dream-like carnival in the town park.

In my discussion I will consider how Victorian theories surrounding the physiological and psychological nature of sleep influenced Brontë, as they point towards the notion of sleep as state that potentially threatens the boundaries of sanity and selfhood. In addition, this paper explores how Brontë's focus on the boundaries and borderlines between waking and sleeping is potentially informed by the narrative structure of the medieval dream vision. In the same way that the poet in a dream vision utilises the dream structure to self reflexively explore their waking self, Bronte repeatedly places Lucy on the borders of consciousness through a series of shifts from slumber to wakefulness in order to convey her complex psychological state. The repeated metaphors and images Lucy attaches to this sensation of wakeful slumber

contribute to our understanding of her as a socially marginalized woman and as a narrator of her own story.

Jennifer Reid (University of Leeds)

'The princess drows[ing] in the castle of her flesh': Angela Carter's revenant Sleeping Beauties

Ever since fairy tales began to attract the interest of feminist scholars in the 1970s, 'Sleeping Beauty' has been considered by feminists as the ultimate, pernicious fable of female acculturation, celebrating feminine passivity in its most extreme form. Concurrent psychoanalytic theories, meanwhile, celebrated the tale as an allegory of self-discovery, the Jungian union between active consciousness and slumbering unconscious without, however, attempting to escape or reject the gendered implications of this archetypal interpretation.

In her fiction and non-fiction from the 1970s, Angela Carter is engaged with these varying interpretations of 'Sleeping Beauty'. Although there has been much critical discussion of her vision of the triumphant female libido in her versions of 'Little Red Riding Hood' and 'Beauty and the Beast', and the role of these fairy tales in her self-professed feminist project to put 'new wine in old bottles', less attention has been paid to her distinctly less celebratory depictions of the slumbering princess, who she associates in various texts with sexual exploitation as necrophilia, parasitical paralysis, madness, and vampirism. Indeed, Carter's understanding of 'Sleeping Beauty' is closely connected to her controversial essay, *The Sadeian Woman*, in which she notoriously criticises the perennial victim status claimed for women by much contemporary feminism. I will therefore chart the uses to which Carter puts sleep and sleepwalking in her texts of the 1970s, situating the fairy tale within a Western tradition of artistic depictions of femininity based on the subconscious assumption that the perfect woman is the dead woman.

Sharihan Al-Akhras (University of Durham)

The Dreams of Eve: Middle Eastern Imagery of the 'Demonised' Feminine in Milton's Paradise Lost

This paper examines the importance of dreams and sleeping in *Paradise Lost* through focusing on Eve, the Mother of Humankind, and Sin, the Portress of Hell, the only female characters in Milton's epic poem. Milton's careful utilisation of dreams and sleeping is undeniably important when introducing his female characters, their creation, their development and their feminine power.

Eve and Sin are usually, and rightly, associated with female figures from Greco-Roman thought. However, it is surprisingly fruitful to examine their relation to female characters from Middle-Eastern culture despite the peculiarity of such an endeavour. Therefore, this paper will compare the similar representations of female characters in *Paradise Lost* and Middle-Eastern texts such as the Islamic Hadith, *The Arabian Nights* and *The Epistle of Forgiveness*.

This work will trace the similarities between the ‘first Eve’ (according to the Jewish tradition), Lilith, and her equivalent female prototype in Arabic literature, the Ghoul. It will also discuss their important feature as shape-shifting demons who appear to travellers of the night (mostly in dreams) in order to lure them back to their cave where they kill and devour them. This description will be closely compared to Sin’s and Eve’s portrayal in the narrative. Finally, the paper will focus on Eve’s dreams (awake and asleep) and their significant relation to the discussion.

Rob Mayo (University of Bristol)

“Must not sleep, must warn others”

My paper examines fear of sleep and the theme of awakening in postmodern film and literature.

From Jack Finney’s 1955 science fiction disaster novel, *The Body Snatchers*, through Ursula Le Guin’s 1971 *The Lathe of Heaven* to Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club*, sleep has been the protagonist’s enemy – a lowering of one’s guard so absolute that reality itself can be altered by one’s enemies. In the 1960s and ‘70s, Philip K Dick would mine the topic of unstable reality and resultant paranoia to huge effect and influence.

Following on from the successful cinematic adaptations of *The Body Snatchers* in the 1950s and ‘70s, the turn of the millennium saw a spate of films that not only questioned the veracity of reality but also figured sleep as the means by which reality could be perverted – *Dark City*, *The Matrix*, and David Fincher’s adaptation of *Fight Club* are each predecessors to Christopher Nolan’s 2010 box-office smash *Inception*.

In literature, the millennial trend of ‘somniphobia’ was preceded by authors such as David Foster Wallace and Jonathan Franzen, who are concerned with justifying the place of literature in the postmodern world. My paper will examine the presentation of sleep in Wallace’s work (in particular *Infinite Jest* and the short story, ‘Oblivion’) and his philosophy of awakening and awareness.

Dr Jacob Empson (University of Hull)

The Experience of Sleep - Representations of Sleep and The Night in literature and the arts.

Objectives and Design

This is an exploration of literary works in English, by qualitative content analysis, of issues of sleep and of the night.

Methods

Concordances, anthologies, and extensive reading identified 350 pieces of writing with substantial relevance to the topics of sleep and the night, mainly from British authors of the last 200 years, but including American works and some in translation from French, Russian and Spanish. In an adaptation of qualitative analytic method, these items were categorized using up to five keywords, and then sorted to give meaningful categories.

Results

Almost exactly half of the items are in verse. About equal numbers of those in prose are extracts from longer works, and complete anecdotes, essays and short stories. The major themes are: a) *the experience of sleep* - accounts of dreams, nightmares, and hypnagogias; b) *sleep disorder* - accounts of insomnia and other problems with sleeping intrinsic to the individual; c) *disturbed sleep* - enforced changes to routine, such as shiftwork or sleep loss; d) *ideas about sleep* – sleep being beneficial, or as Death's brother, as well as ambivalence about the night. Each theme includes four categories, which are further subdivided into *sub-categories*.

About 60 works of figurative art, relating to the themes and categories, are used to illustrate the analysis. They were categorized using the same taxonomy as that derived for the textual items.

This presentation, using Powerpoint, will describe the methodology, then give examples from the first major theme – *The Experience of Sleep*.

Kate Gazzard (University of Reading)

Mapping the Hidden Workings of the Mind: Mesmerism, Dream Theory and Paranormal Phenomena.

Mapping and movement of the nineteenth century strove for ordered circulation through the incoherent labyrinthine streets.² Lynda Nead states that reformers saw London as a colossal body, consuming goods and people,³ while the anatomists saw the human body as an organic machine, which could be divided into smaller systems. Medical views of the body were influenced by cultural views of society: particularly the need for division, while cultural views of London became likewise influenced by medicalisation, with authors such as Charles Dickens exploiting medical ideas and imagery. Cultural fascinations were grounded in the notion of 'a physically healthy body as the basis of a modern state',⁴ which was to be ordered and, as a result, contained.

This paper will explore Dickens's fascinations with observation and categorisation, patterns of examination and analysis used by medicine. It will take into account Dickens's exposure to medicine, the friendships he forged with important contributors including John Elliotson and demonstrate how they allowed Dickens to experiment with medical ideas in his early works. One can trace his oscillating interest in the 'mappable' body, on the one hand, and the noumenal energies of mesmerism, dream theory and paranormal phenomena on the other, an interplay that fed straight into his well-known fascination for fact versus fancy.

Jimmy Packham, (University of Bristol)

² Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: people, streets and images in nineteenth-century London* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2005), p.13.

³ *Ibid*, p.15.

⁴ Pamela K. Gilbert, 'Medical Mapping: The Thames, the body and *Our Mutual Friend*', in *Filth. Dirt, Disgust, and Modern Life*, ed. William A. Cohen and Ryan Johnson (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p.79.

“I have been sleeping—and now—now—I am dead”: Sleep and the Experience of Death in Poe

Spatially conceived, the unconscious traditionally haunts the depths; it operates, the Freudian informs us, just beneath the surface, largely inaccessible to the conscious mind. In related, though rather more mythic and symbolic, terms, it is an underworld – psychoanalyst James Hillman, for example, adopts just such a framework in *The Dream and the Underworld*. And it is primarily through dreams that the conscious and the unconscious mind seem perceptibly united, and through which we appear to have sensory access to the illogical landscape of this psychic underworld.

Through these terms, sleeping may be read as type of nightly *nekylia* – a journey into the underworld for knowledge or experience off-limits to the mortal human or their waking consciousness. While such a statement may be scientifically dubious, it is an idea with plenty of literary precedents. Edgar Allan Poe exploits these ideas numerous times in his fictional and theoretical works. So tangible is the dream-world of Arthur Gordon Pym that he seems to be able to bring objects from them into his reality; and the hypnotic sleep into which M. Valdemar is placed is strong enough to permanently bridge the gap between the waking world and death.

With reference to a number of Poe’s works, this paper discusses Poe’s conception of the momentary connect that sleep permits with other or under-worlds. I argue that Poe views the dream-world not simply as a source of inspiration, but as a place that permits, through its union of the conscious and unconscious, an experience of death while the individual is, paradoxically, still alive.

Sharon Gailbraith (Univerity of Lancaster)

Short Death, Long Sleep: Sleep as Empty Time in Early Modern Readings of *Piers Plowman*

In 1611, Thomas Draxe published his *Christian Armorie*, in which he notes: ‘First, sleepe is a resemblance of death, and the image of it, for they differ only in time, sleep being but a *short death* and death a *long sleepe*, and therefore the lesse that we sleepe, the longer doe wee liue’ (Draxe, 1611). For Draxe, sleep clearly functions as both a shadow of and a precursor to death. Indeed, as the *Christian Armorie* figures sleep as a vacuum into which time is relentlessly poured, time, sleep and death form an inclusive triumvirate that encapsulates pre-modern anxieties surrounding issues of human agency and mortality. My paper will examine the ways in which these ‘Draxian’ notions of sleep and time were foreshadowed in William Langland’s canonical dream-vision, *Piers Plowman* (1360-87; publ. 1550). Here, the relentless strides of time, sleep and mortality are witnessed in the structure of the poem itself, with each Passus (literally, ‘step’) featuring a protracted depiction of a prolonged sleep. Each ‘step’ brings the reader ever closer to an ending as the verse examines the passage of time and the inevitability of death through the progression of the protagonist’s sleep.

Dr. Sarah De Jong Carson, (University of Toronto)

“The bright bone of a dream”: Dreams of the Dead in North American Memoirs

Dreams of the dead have become a remarkably common narrative device in North American memoirs over the past thirty years. Typically appearing in family memoirs and “relational” memoirs that deal with the impact of a specific person on the memoir writer, such dreams often introduce or conclude the narrative, invoking the dead to offer ambiguous forms of authorization—as in, for instance, Michael Ondaatje’s *Running in the Family* (1982) and Lorna Goodison’s *From Harvey River* (2007)—or of condemnation, as in the haunting dream that ends Philip Roth’s *Patrimony* (1991). While these dreams make for compelling narratives, their prevalence in a wide range of writers’ memoirs raises questions about the affinities between dreams, bereavement, and the memoir genre itself. Why are dreams the vehicle of these encounters with the dead that linger between the real-life phenomena of bereavement dreams and the artful constructions of narrative? In this paper, I argue that narrative dreams are prominent in memoirs because they offer contained, indeterminate spaces for exploring questions of authority, relationality, and loss that mirror the open-endedness of the memoir genre. They pose the promise of meaningfulness and, often, of a reassuring afterlife for the dead alongside an ambiguity of interpretation that is paradoxically comforting and acceptable. Further, dreams provide opportunities for writers to ventriloquize their subjects’ posthumous support or rejection of their representations, gesturing both to a desire for reciprocity and dialogue, and to the limitations and ethical dilemmas involved in writing about the dead.