

An Abyss of Dreams

SAMPLER

Also by Giacomo Donis

The Empty Shield

SAMPLE

An Abyss of Dreams

tails of the night of the world

meta-memoir

Giacomo Donis

SAMPLE

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IN MEMORY OF GIANFRANCO DI GIUSEPPE
25 January 1945–29 November 2010
SEI SEMPRE CON NOI

All my thanks to Anthony Rudolf, great friend!
— mon semblable, — mon frère!

When you asked me how I was doing, was that some kind of joke
—Bob Dylan, 'Desolation Row'

it's the abyss that keeps us all alive, only the abyss,
—Thomas Bernhard

A decision. Thinking. Imagining. An idea just pops into my head.
Fine. No problem. The problem is that then I start to chase it. Like
a cat chasing her tail. OK. But, then, this idea I'm chasing leads me
to another idea. And I chase it. From one idea, another. Another.
Another again. Free association. How free? What association.
—*The Empty Shield*

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PART ONE

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I. Marmari Nights

an abyss of dreams

I.

Returning around midnight to my large room, with the ping-pong table, I noticed the lights were on, which was a very bad sign. The door was unlocked. I opened it, went inside, and a burly intruder rushed upon me and thrust his long knife straight into my stomach, twisting it all the way to the left, then all the way to the right.

II.

Returning around midnight to my room with the ping-pong table, I was surprised and concerned to see that the lights were on. The door was unlocked, I went inside, and an old friend came forward and embraced me. He had come with his mother to pay me a visit. They had found the key in its usual place, under a rock, and let themselves in.

III.

Returning around midnight to my room, darkness and silence hung over it like a shroud. I took the key from under the rock, opened the door, went inside and turned on the light. A huge black fly—I had never seen a fly anywhere near this big before—took off from the ping-pong table and flew right into my face. It took all my strength and ability to fend off the attacks of this atrocious fly.

IV.

I left the lights on and the door wide open—there's a screen door to keep out the dogs—in my room, in case someone wished to play ping-pong while I was out. Returning around midnight, I found everything exactly as I had left it.

V.

Returning to my room around midnight, I was met by a gaping hole instead of a door. It looked as if the iron door had been mangled by some incredible powerful alien life form. I stepped through the hole and turned on the light. Looking around the room, I discovered that all the ping-pong balls had been stolen.

VI.

The oleanders were bathed in moonlight when I returned to my room, with the ping-pong table, around midnight. What peace! What quiet! I opened the door with the key under the rock, stepped inside, turned on the light, and discovered a gray cat curled up asleep at the foot of my bed.

July 2006, Marmari, Greece

II. Parrot: a parody of origin

for the people of a shattered Yugoslavia

The winter rain was falling in big slow drops. By some quirk of fate I found myself, barely on the wrong side of forty, subtracted three times a week from my adopted hearth in Venice, somehow fallen prey to a poorly paid lecturer's job at the University of Padua. I had been engaged to lecture on 'The Puritan Spirit in North American Literature,' and almost at once I made myself perfectly at home in my new position, much like a goldfish in the Sahara desert. Perhaps, thanks to this aura of alienation that I emitted from every pore, three students flocked to my lectures. Faithful, unflagging in their presence, albeit somewhat sleepy, since my lessons were just after lunch, and the Latin digestion, compared to the Anglo-Saxon, is rightfully reputed to be rather slow. I droned on, lucidly, brilliantly, and in the full originality of my exalted bewilderment, about 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,' the poetics of Edgar Allan Poe, Emersonian obscurity, Thoreau's 'different drummer,' Melville's relation to Hegel's first triad, and the intimate vivacity of Emily Dickinson. Oddly enough, my class followed me enthusiastically and without fear in my not infrequent forays into the realm of philosophy (a place where in fact I did feel quite at home), but they manifested with great disdain—drooping eyelids or frozen stares—their utter aversion to poetry. To poetry! O tempora! O mores! Out of Whitman's relentless, unhaltingly endless verses I offered them pieces of true genius like this, 'Reconciliation,' written at the end of the Civil War:

Word over all, beautiful as the sky!
 Beautiful that war and all its deeds of carnage must in time be utterly lost,
 That the hands of the sisters Death and Night incessantly softly wash
 again, and ever again, this soil'd world;
 For my enemy is dead, a man divine as myself is dead,
 I look where he lies white-faced and still in the coffin—I draw near,
 Bend down and touch lightly with my lips the white face in the coffin.

I even tried to batter them with Dickinsonian masterpieces:

There is a solitude of space
 A solitude of sea
 A solitude of death, but these
 Society shall be
 Compared with that profounder site
 That polar privacy
 A soul admitted to itself—
 Finite Infinity.

Finally, Allen Ginsberg's 'A Supermarket in California' did seem to disturb their slumber somewhat, making the poetry pill less bitter—but that was in late spring, at term's end. As usual I've gotten carried away, racing far ahead of my story.

The winter rain was falling in big slow drops. As was the case every Wednesday from noon till 1 p.m. I was sitting at the corner table of a rather charming bar near the University—one of the least frequented bars in all Padua, the devil knows why!—drinking mineral water, eating a small sandwich, and keenly observing a middle-sized mangy parrot immobile on its perch in the far corner of the room. I say 'middle sized' because its dimensions were somewhere between tiny parrots *de poche* of my acquaintance and certain enormous creatures big as buzzards. Wednesday from noon till one was my hour for receiving students, and given the madding throng that sat before me three times a week, and given my lifelong sympathy (I could nearly say empathy) for parrots, who share with mankind the divine gift of speech (in some cases), I figured I might as well kill two birds with one stone and hold my reception hour not in my office, as one usually does, but in this bar, where for an hour I could count on gazing at the speechless creature. The color of the bird was splendid, despite its manginess. A vivid soft green that more than made up for its silence. And as for my class, my flock, my throng of students—in the seven months I taught, from November to May, never, not once did one appear! So I had plenty of time to contemplate 'my' parrot (I say 'my' because no one else ever seemed to notice it), and think: Oh divine gift of speech, Language, the House of Being, do we humans pronounce one phrase out of ten thousand that shows us to be *truly* more intelligent (or closer to God or to Being) than my cat? This, just to explain my personal empathy for parrots, whose iterations are, on the whole, not much more senseless than my own.

Gray, gray, the winter rain was falling, but the ineffable softness of the green of those mangy feathers took me far away, transported me far from Padua in winter and from the gray light of Venice, to a place without students or salaries, taxes or telephones, fax machines or TV, a place where they don't even have computers! To endless soft green rolling hills, to an overpowering swirl of forest green. To a life of unremittingly requited passion. The huge gray drops, the parrot, the absent throng of students.

Some years ago—it doesn't matter how long anymore—on a broiling hot Manhattan morning in July I was sauntering down Hudson Street arm in arm with my new friend Tina. We were talking about sculpture, and I was thinking about the shortness of life, thinking about crossing Pound's 'infernal ripples.' I noticed a lot of people drinking beer. We had actually gone out to do some shopping—yogurt, bread, cat food, the usual things—when, just across the street, an astounding swirl of green captured my attention. That brilliant, shimmering, overpowering soft green that always

makes me dream of places I've never seen and most likely never will. Naxos perhaps, or the *dolce* Umbria. The Amazon. I grabbed Tina by the hand, leaped off the curb—and by a sheer quirk of fate (and about three inches) was not utterly obliterated by an onrushing taxi. (Too many years in Venice, I forget about such things. Where I live about the worst that can happen is you get blind drunk and fall into a filthy canal.) Regaining my aplomb and calming my excitement, Tina and I carefully crossed the street and found ourselves before a pet store with an enormous, extremely exotic parrot in an even more enormous cage. The door to the shop was open and a well-dressed young man, his eye on the magnificent bird, was conversing with the owner. 'Fifteen thousand' we heard the owner reply—such was the price of this prize—and 'fifteen thousand' screeched the parrot, stoically. 'Fifteen thousand' said the young man. Some years ago, I can't remember how many. So much water has flowed through the canals since then. My mind wanders.

I was nearly lost in deep, dark thought as I crossed the Rialto bridge late one spring afternoon on my way home after visiting my psychiatrist. Once, when I was especially depressed, Tina talked to me on the phone from New York for more than an hour about 'the darkness and the dazzle.' (Made me think of Heraclitus, the way up is the way down.) My psychiatrist—who was also my friend—had just been talking about 'great depressions,' depressions that last a lifetime (cheerful thought), while I kept peering in my mind's eye at those infernal ripples—'whether there be any patch left of us/ after we cross the infernal ripples'—and just hoping that a lifetime would be long enough. Darkness, I mused, was darkness of the mind. And dazzle, the blindness of the spirit.

Walking slowly, very pensively, along the Riva del Vin, the twilight glimmering on the Grand Canal, I got to thinking about a line I'd read in a book review somewhere, that stuck in my mind: 'It affirms the absurd, passionate attachment of the dying to life—like the exile's to the roots.' On TV I'd seen a man crying, repeatedly—an Istrian—because the war, the wars had cut him off from his home, his village, his patch of land, his native speech, his history—in other words, his roots. Tears of terrifying pain, deeper, perhaps, than for the death of a loved one, because less ephemeral. But if you ask me where I come from, what can I say? I come from the land of the Puritans, from the shadows of Hiroshima and Cuba and Vietnam, from New York in the late '60s—these are my 'roots.' I've never set foot in the lands of my grandparents, wherever they were they don't exist anymore. I've lived these past twenty years—practically my entire adult life—here in Venice, a dying city absurdly attached to life. A labyrinth without monsters, just a web of twisting paths leading nowhere, and a slow swirl of images. An exile, but from what? From my own passions? from joy? from splendor? From my own mind, or from Zen mind? 'When you give up, when you no longer want something, or when you do not try to do anything special, then

you do something.' Exiled from the dazzle of a homeland? rather, like a small ship on a sea without shores. The absurd, passionate attachment of the dying to life—just then a strange thing happened.

Lost in thought on the Riva del Vin, I was walking under the enormous scaffolding of an ancient *palazzo* that was in the process of having its face lifted when, all of a sudden, a splendid small green parrot dropped from the scaffolding and landed at my feet. The waters of the Grand Canal were silently streaking with orange. I looked down at the unmoving bird. It looked bewildered. This was no place for a parrot. A couple of Germans stopped and took some photographs. A passerby asked me 'È il tuo?'—'Is it yours?' There were already two or three stray cats shifting from paw to paw, maliciously. 'No,' I replied, 'e che facciamo?' I bent down and at once the parrot hopped onto my forearm, digging in gently with its claws. Not a mangy Paduan bar parrot, definitely not a fifteen-thousand-dollar New Yorker, it was a marvelous smallish bird with clean, unruffled feathers of that soft splendid green which makes me dream. 'What to do?' By now a small group of people had gathered round, there was a certain amount of Venetian chatter. One woman claimed to know the provenance of the parrot and rang two or three doorbells of a house nearby, but no one answered. The canal was flaming into night. At last the headwaiter of a restaurant near the Rialto came rushing towards me. 'Signora Gallo has lost her parrot!' he exclaimed as the bird hopped from my arm to his. And hot on his heels came Signora Gallo herself, a small skinny white-haired lady whose eyes lit up like twin suns when she saw the beloved creature. 'Tesoro mio! Il mio cattivello piccolo tesoro!' she cried as the parrot fluttered immediately onto her shoulder. 'My naughty little darling! Since they put up this scaffolding what an adventurer you have become!'

The cats had vanished by this time and the sun had set. The mind goes dark at the coming of night. I gazed for a while at the black waters, trying to make out the ripples. 'The waters of Styx poured over the wound.' An endless expanse of tender green filled my eyes and instantly absorbed my tears. My thoughts fled swiftly, escaping me. The splendor of those soft green wings. 'Oh, fatality! Oh, nature! Everyone on earth is alone. That is the tragedy!' The mourners carried chains at Dostoyevsky's funeral, to remind the living that Dostoyevsky too had been a prisoner and an exile. I cry out to humanity, but no one is listening. If only I had the soft, wondrous green feathers of the parrot, some skinny old lady would surely seek me out, I'd hop onto her shoulder and thank her with my parrot's speech. But alas, it was only an instant, without beginning, without end, already lost in the labyrinth of time. In death at last I shall go *swiftly*. Propelled by these huge black wings I am already a white speck on the horizon.

references

whether there be any patch left of us/ after we cross the infernal ripples

Ezra Pound, *Homage to Sextus Propertius*, XII

When you give up, when you no longer want something,

Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, p. 47

The waters of Styx

Ezra Pound, *Homage to Sextus Propertius*, XII

'Oh, fatality! Oh, nature!

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *A Gentle Creature*

'Parrot' was originally published in *Fine Madness*, Seattle, summer/fall 1993.

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PART TWO

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III. Why Dream?

a therapeutic ramble

Behold, this dreamer cometh. Come now therefore and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams.

Genesis, 37:19-20

To sleep! perchance to dream:

Hamlet, Act III Scene I

Logic is doubtless unshakable, but it cannot withstand a man who wants to go on living.

Franz Kafka, The Trial

'early to bed'

I had a good dream this morning, between 10:30 and 11:15. All my life my 'nights' have been out of sync with the world. Even as a kid I couldn't sleep at night. Nightmares, all the time. Bad dreams that really scared me. Long ones, and often. I got up early for school, totally exhausted. I still remember what those dreams were like. Absolutely non-figurative, just huge bursts of color. Red, orange, **FIERY**, like sunsets in hell gruesomely blotting the horizon. Very frightening. Finally I went away to college, in New York. I lived by myself on the Lower East Side, and it was there that I found my rhythm. Studying until dawn, listening to records of Bach and Monk, a brisk jog to Brooklyn and back on the Williamsburg Bridge, and then to bed. And up at 11, fresh as a daisy, ready to set out for Washington Square. Great to be free and young. Some weekends and some summers I drove a taxi to support myself. Again nights, until dawn. Then, as always, 'early to bed.' The great thing was that for those four years (from 1968 to 1972), for the only time in my life, I had practically no dreams. Why no dreams? (But—Why Dream?! *That* is our question.) Perhaps because what I saw all around me every day was nightmare enough. My neighborhood (my block on Rivington Street was one of the most dangerous in New York at that time, but the rent was very low), Nixon on TV, the outrageous things I saw from my taxi. Then, there was my own *no-dream* question about the Vietnam war. It was a time of extreme isolation and solitude. And intense study. And practically no dreams.

When I moved to Europe—I was 21, I'm 61 now—I maintained my 'natural' rhythm, for a dozen years or so. Sun up, and 'early to bed.' (No more running, my knees swelled up if I jogged.) But the dreams were back, and they were not good. Some of them—some extremely powerful ones—left an indelible mark on my entire life. Still, after a period of near starvation there were some real good times. Lots of new friends. A little money—my Sardinian companions in Denmark taught me how to make necklaces to sell on the street and, thanks to them both (the Sardinians and the necklaces), I survived. But then I made my move. A big one. Back home here in Venice (I still live in this same house on this courtyard after all these years) I took a quantum leap, from Scandinavian street necklaces to *earrings* for boutiques. Italian boutiques for a year. Then Switzerland. Then Germany. A one-man show. A quantum leap. It was the proverbial *rags to riches*. Making earrings until dawn, listening to cassettes of Bach and Monk, drinking excellent vodka, enjoying night visits from friends of all sorts, who loved to watch me work with my alpaca wire and splendid Venetian glass beads. But the dreams came back. The nightmares returned. Graphic this time, not the old terrible 'sunsets in hell.' Figures, characters, situations, even a few voices. (I *regressed* from abstract to figurative art.) Such good nights, splendid—all night till dawn—then those terrible dream-drenched mornings. Not sleeping till 11, then *up*! fresh as a daisy, but tossing tormented till noon, till 1 o'clock, till . . . whenever. Tired again. Why those dreams? Why Dream? I think about them now, those 'early to bed' years. Right up to 1984, when I quit making earrings and started translating books by Italian philosophers and, alas, Italian *art critics*. Lovers, travels, friends. Alas, *no cats*. But nightmares aplenty, and sleeplessness. Then a Paris fiancée *with cats*. Worse nightmares. (About her, not the cats.) Worse insomnia. Since then just a few cosmically exciting women (only extremes—love or passion, mutually exclusive) and two cats of my 'own.' (My partners. Nobody 'owns' cats. Gina for almost 17 years, now Gilda, she's 8.) But nightmares! *Dreams*, of every size, shape and description. *Why? Why Dream?* My mother says that even when I was an infant I had infant bad dreams, sputtering, making noises and little jerks. Well—now, at last, I have decided to *tackle* the question. Gently. But seriously. All my life, tormented, hounded, *pounded* with dreams. Dreams? Almost all of them bad. Nightmares, and day-mares—morning-mares, actually. Long heavy poundings. Why? Why Dream?

the blood gets into your dreams

OK, I'm over 60 now, I've had a bunch of ailments—disorders, let's say—and I need more 'sleeping time.' Right now, from 2 or 3 a.m. (or even 1:30) until 11, 11:30. Even 10:30. I can't sleep in the morning like before. Why not? Certainly not because I'm more in sync with the world. Quite the contrary,

I'm totally out of it. But then—why? Why can't I sleep in the morning like before? Just tired? Tired of nights? Absolutely. More 'tired of nights' than 'just tired.' But in permanent exile from mornings. Like the dying Goethe, I want 'more light.' But not in the morning. But—between night and morning, what is there? Noon light, afternoon light, evening light, is good light, like a good dream. But morning light—I treat this slab of the day like a burning coal, like embers up my ass. This is not simply an anti-morning prejudice. The fact is, every day I need time to recover from my dreams.

For forty years now, this storm of killing dreams, one, two, three, four a 'night,' each lasting an hour, two hours, each followed by an hour's torment of sleeplessness. Or, sometimes, by just a short quivering 'break,' a few minutes, then the next one, then the next, and the next. Probably. Or, sometimes, short dreams, lasting five, ten, fifteen minutes. But a slew of them. Too many to count. Serial dreams, like serial killers, with short interruptions. Like endless TV programs, with commercials. How have I survived a lifetime of these dreams? Why Dream? Why do I dream? I have a suspicion but no idea. It's not self-hatred. Why can't I sleep—ever—even for five blessed minutes—without a dream? Even if I take an afternoon nap after a 'bad night' and *finally*, after a couple of hours, fall asleep—BANG, I wake up dreaming. Badly. I often cry after my dreams, because almost all of them are bad. Four, five in the morning, my cat snuggled up so peacefully, the peaceful silent town, and me, crying after a dream. A good dream? Yes, it's possible, but once in a blue moon. A blue *full* moon. Do I always dream because I always—always—*think*? Monkey mind, the Zen master calls it. That's my suspicion, but it's not an idea, not an explanation. 'The mind as Ixion, unstill, ever turning.' Even when I have nothing to think about, I think anyway. Why? *Why* do I always think? I have done Zen meditation most of my life, all alone, without a master or companions. (Though Gilda, my second cat, is a Zen master in disguise.) In some periods I've *really* done it. Forty minutes in which the mind waves die away, almost to nothing. I've even known first hand what satori is. But—all the same—all day, all night, I constantly talk to myself, in my head (no, not out loud), about things I hope will happen and things I hope won't happen. (But is talking thinking, exactly? Are talking and thinking the same?) Big things, medium-sized things, very small things. I admit it, I daydream. A lot. But this is completely different from my night-dreams. (Many of them in the morning, as I said.) At 'night' you have no control, but when you daydream you are conscious. You can 'consciously' give some direction to things when you daydream. It's something completely different. Of course I have both recurrent day-dreams and recurrent night-dreams. For example, during the day I often 'see' (in my mind) the broken pieces of my beloved black ceramic teapot that C. brought me from Tokyo twenty years ago. It's horrible! A horrible sight. But, immediately—simultaneously, perhaps—I know it's not

true, fortunately. Not now anyway, but some day it could be true. (Will be true? Won't be true?) Wish fulfillment—forget it. Death wish—well, could be, but what in the world does that mean? But, above all, what does it mean to be 'conscious'? Now *this*, for me, is a *big* question. I've thought about it all my life. That was *my* question. *The* question. This question right now—Why Dream?—even if it has *been there* all along, is actually a new question, I never posed it before like this. Why pose it now? Basically, out of desperation, out of *too many dreams*, and too few dreamless 'nights.' Almost *none*. I shall definitely get back to that question—What is consciousness?—later. And the dream I had this morning. Later. I am trying to ramble in an orderly fashion, and not to rant too much. (Hopefully.) (And if I do—gently.) And what about this talking to myself all day. (And night?) Even when I work, translating books of philosophy, if possible (instead of art critics)—well, it's a little better. I feel less alone, more focused, not thinking about a million useless things. But, come to think of it, all this translation business is basically a 'talking to myself.' It's a self-conversation about a tangle of someone else's dreams, a strange business. OK, let me tell you about a very strange sort of dream (night-dream) I often have. In the dream I'm working on a translation that I did maybe years, decades ago, or perhaps am doing now. So far it's not all that strange, translating 'gets into your blood' and the blood gets into your dreams. (It's like taxi driving. The old-timers in New York used to tell me, Don't let hacking get into your blood. Fat chance! I had other fish to fry.) Or I'm working on the translation of a book I never translated. (Slightly stranger.) Or, on the translation of a book that doesn't exist. Pretty damn strange. But the really strange part comes now. In these dreams, which go on for hours and hours, and even if the dream-book is a book that actually exists and that I'm actually translating, the actual text itself *actually doesn't exist*. I mean, I never dream some phrase or term that I actually translated—badly perhaps, with difficulty, at least *that* would make sense. No, I dream—or the dream dreams—actual phrases, texts, that don't exist. That are actual dream-texts. I can actually see the dream making up the text I have to translate as we (the dream and I) go along. The 'dream work,' as Freud put it. Then, in the dream, I actually do translate the nonexistent text. I don't know if I've made this clear enough for you. Words tend to fail. You have to be there yourself to get a grip on it. What's more, in the dream the text itself I'm translating sort of flickers, it comes and goes, exists and slips into nothingness. It's something well-defined and then, gradually, *I'm translating nothing*. Finally, I wake up. How do I feel? It depends. On what? On the text itself? How tough to translate it was? Or on how much it flickered? I'm not sure. After these *extremely long* dreams sometimes I feel refreshed and happy but most of the time I feel totally exhausted, as if I'd been translating for a hundred hours straight. For the record, I have a frequent variant on these dreams, where instead of translating I'm writing a story, novel, philosophy essay or some such, that I'm actually writing now, or actually wrote perhaps long ago. Or—most

of the time—that I actually never wrote, am not writing, or will never write, on some subject that I’ve never even thought about in the least. But the ‘dream work’ is the same. Freud’s term. In this case *le mot juste*.

‘I have a dream’

I’ll get back to the subject of ‘dream work’ later. I should tell you about a couple of dreams I’ve had this past month, this warm November. I warn you, not cheerful stuff. Some of the sad, bad, disturbing dreams that have induced me, finally, to tackle this question—why? Why Dream? Especially if they’re almost always bad. By the way—have you noticed how incredibly often everyone talks about dreams these days, but in a stupid sense that obviously has nothing to do with my question, or even with dreams in the *proper* sense at all. It seems that everyone, everywhere, *always*, ‘has a dream.’ (You say I’m ‘out of it’ because I have dreams—nightmares, actually—in the morning. But ‘always’ means morning, noon, afternoon, evening, and night.) If you ask any soccer, football, baseball, basketball, hockey, cricket, chess, ping-pong, or stamp-collecting coach, or whatever, about the team, or whatever, How’s it going?, they all answer ‘We have a dream.’ All of them. I kid you not. *All of them*. All the time. ‘We have a dream.’ Winning the championship, winning the next match, not losing the next match since we’ve already lost five in a row. A dream! To say nothing of *miracles*. Sports has become the world of miracles. Lourdes is a speck of dust besides it. If the worst team in the league beats the best, *miracle*. If a goaltender blocks a tricky shot, the guy on Italian TV screams—screams!—*MIRACOLO! MIRACOLO!* Isn’t it ridiculous. Just think, with all the matches, all around the world, every week, every day—thousands, *millions* of miracles. (‘Which way to the miracle?’ as Fellini put it, a long time ago, in the first scene of *La dolce vita*.) Let me tell you about a guy I knew, a Greek, L., many years ago on a Greek island. L. had a small taverna on the beach and rented out a few rooms. If ever anyone happened to say, ‘Hi L. How’s it going?’ he said, ‘Exo ena oneiro.’ ‘I have a dream.’ (He wanted to demolish the taverna and build a small hotel, big deal.) He drove everyone crazy with that ‘exo ena oneiro’ of his. I mean, he said it *all the time* (all the time!), I can still remember his voice forty years later. Low, grave, determined, almost reverent. But actually it was very funny. Downright ridiculous. But he drove us crazy. We wanted to kill him and throw him in some pit like Joseph in the Bible, just to shut him up. I mean, just how many times did we have to listen to this constant ‘exo ena oneiro’ of his? A few years later he did get that hotel built (big deal), and then he didn’t know what to say anymore. If you asked him How’s it going? he just grunted. Ridiculously. In fact, after all these years, I still have this funny dream from time to time about L. and his hotel. Most of the dream is a good

one. (For once.) Entertaining. Right there on the beach L. had built a real *DREAM* hotel. A skyscraper, one hundred stories high. And a small taverna on the top, on the roof. On this little island that had more donkeys than people. Nothing else around, some normal little tavernas a couple of miles away, and this giant tower right there on the beach. But the plot thickens. L., in fact, was a religious person like many Greeks (Orthodox), but strictly in the sense of crossing himself hundreds of times a day and being extremely superstitious. Especially about numbers, so, OK, no room 13, no 13th floor. It's called triskaidekaphobia. But he was deeply concerned about a lot of other numbers too. Worried. The solution: in this *DREAM* hotel, he decided not to number anything at all. I mean, no room numbers and no floor numbers at all. In the dream hordes of people show up, get their keys from L. at the reception, and head up to their rooms—and *I wake up screaming*. It turns out to be a horror dream! Total chaos. Violent. Destructive. Totally bewildered people, totally lost, totally frightened, violent, people hiding, running for their lives through the numberless unnumbered floors. Wake up! Wake up! It's only a dream. 'Exo ena oneiro,' L. always said. What a stupid way of putting it. All he had to say was, I'd like to build a hotel, I'd *really* like to build a hotel, I *hope* to build a hotel. *Voilà*, the proper expression. It's not Faith, *Dream*, and Charity—forget it. *Hope*. Why doesn't the coach say, quite simply, I *hope* we win the championship. I *hope* we don't lose the next game, we've already lost ten in a row. Believe me, he has dreams *about* losing the eleventh game in a row. It's called a *nightmare* and it is, indeed, in the true and proper sense, a dream.

But I was trying to make a point here if I can just remember what it was. Freud. 'Dream work.' (A cure for unemployment.) Wish fulfillment! I'll get back to this later. But, for the moment, I need to confront this 'I have a dream' *army of occupation*. It's clear, I think, that this daytime daydream mundane and extraordinarily banal 'I have a dream' (Martin Luther King excepted) is indeed an expression of wish fulfillment, or of a wish for wish fulfillment. But my point is, if the dream in 'I have a dream' is always something positive, something wished-for (no coach on earth says 'I have a dream that we'll lose the eleventh game in a row!'), then—I mean, what about all my bad dreams? This flood, this mayhem of dreams that makes me ask, finally, Why Dream? I mean, when you dream about building a hotel or winning the championship, you never ask yourself, Why Dream? You just do it. You dream. But—this is my point—if *practically everyone on earth* goes around saying 'I have a dream' all the time in a totally positive sense—well, I have a question. I raise my hand. Let's limit ourselves to their *real* dreams, the so-called night-time ones (but I have lots in the morning) they have when they're (theoretically) unconscious (but what does *that* mean?), or, more simply, when they're *asleep*. Are all *these* such marvels of happiness and satisfaction that during the 'daytime' (when

they are, so to speak, ‘conscious’) they say ‘I have a dream’ to express happiness and satisfaction? Or, at the very least, to hope for it. And—my point—if their dreams are such paradigms of happiness ‘by day’ (so to speak) then, I figure, logically speaking, they must be pretty damn happy ‘by night’ too. I mean, happy in their ‘real’ dreams. Their *DREAM* dreams, so to speak. But then, how come mine are so miserable and frightening? Sure, I could say, if I wanted, ‘I have a dream’ (say, to get this ramble finished and be done with it), but I’d never say it, considering the miserable dreams I actually have. But everyone else’s dreams? Are they really all so great? So happy? Their *DREAM* dreams I mean. The ones they have when they’re asleep.

My grandfather, whom I adored, was a wonderful man and an uncomplicated one. He never learned to read or write in any language, neither of the ‘old country’ nor of the new one either. He put an X (and even that was pretty illegible, as I recall) when he had to sign his name. He was close to a hundred years old when he died. I can’t imagine him having nightmares. Maybe I’m wrong. It’s way too late to ask him about it now, but I can’t imagine it. Once he told me—with such supreme calm and ease, that was it, he was at ease with himself—about how when he was about fifteen, in Lithuania (it was either Poland or Russia then, or possibly both), his parents died and, with his younger sister, they had to walk for days from their village through the countryside to get to Vilnius to find their uncle. ‘Without even an egg to eat,’ he told me. But so serenely. A sack of onions and dry bread. (‘Be strong as an onion’ he always said, all his life.) He told me about a flat gray misty land with small trees and many lakes. The way he described it did sound like a dream. (I saw land that looked just like it in a scene from Tarkovsky’s *Andrey Rublyov*.) But certainly not a nightmare. Just a land. Just a journey. My grandfather was truly not a philosopher. He did things, simply, with intelligence. When he had something to do (and he did lots of things in his long life) he didn’t chew the fat about it, he did it. But then, the last time I saw him, in 1972, he was over 90, he told me something that stunned me, it seemed so totally out of character. So philosophical. I can remember his voice exactly, now, forty years later, he said: ‘Life is a dream. Only when you die you wake up and find out if it was a good dream or a nightmare.’ I quote him exactly, word for word. I bet in all his life my grandfather never said ‘I have a dream.’ He just did it. Worked, slept. Woke up.

some miserable dreams

On the other hand, I’ve had some *miserable* dreams this past month. This warm November. Let me tell you about three of them, real short versions. Good examples of my typical dreams. To let you know—finally—something