No Man's Land as Dream Play

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HIRST Let us change the subject.
Pause
For the last time.
Pause
What have I said?

FOSTER You said you're changing the subject for the last time.

HIRST But what does that mean?

FOSTER It means you'll never change the subject again… It means forever. It means that the subject is changed once and for all and for the last time forever. If the subject is winter, for instance, it'll be winter forever.

HIRST Is the subject winter?

FOSTER The subject is now winter. So it'll therefore be winter forever.

BRIGGS And for the last time.

FOSTER Which will last forever. If the subject is winter, for example, spring will never come.

HIRST But let me ask you — I must ask you —

FOSTER Summer will never come.

BRIGGS The trees —

FOSTER Will never bud.

HIRST I must ask you —

BRIGGS Snow —

FOSTER Will fall forever. Because you've changed the subject. For the last time.

It is easy to see that this dialogue from the conclusion of *No Man's Land* (149–151) has slipped the bonds of realism. It would probably not be difficult to gather responses like "mysterious," "enigmatic" or perhaps just "weird" from viewers and spectators, and to call such a scene "dreamlike" would seem no more precise or revealing a description. This essay will argue, however, that there are some fairly strong "clinical" grounds for calling *No Man's Land* one of the most dreamlike plays in Pinter's *œuvre*, indeed in modern drama: not because a particular scheme of dream interpretation like the Freudian one is the key to understanding the latent content of the work (as Lucina Gabbard argues in *The Dream Structure of Pinter's Plays*), but rather because so many elements of dream phenomenology keep appearing in the play. These elements powerfully create the impression noted by Anthony Suter when he referred to the play as "the mystery of the working of human mind itself" (89). The owner of the mind, the center of consciousness, is Hirst, and the other characters may profitably be viewed as aspects of Hirst's psyche acting out his conflicting desires; that is, the play is at least arguably a psychomachia. The dreamlike ambience is appropriate for that form, which has always called upon archetypes from within the subconscious and which could not operate within the rules governing more naturalistic drama.

"What are dreams like?" is a topic on which everyone is a first-hand expert, but it still takes some work to put what everybody knows into specific terms. J. Allan Hobson, in *The Dreaming Brain*, employs a wealth of written and oral accounts of dreams (as well as the author's own recollections) to build up such a database. Among the common features of dreams he notes are:

> discontinuities (with unexplained changes of subject, action, and setting); improbabilities and impossibilities (with frank defiance of physical law); incongruities (with plot or scene features that do not fit together); and uncertainties (with explicit vagueness of explanation) […] To explain these unique and remarkable dream features, illogical thought processes — such as non sequiturs,

> post-hoc explanations, and symbolic, mythical, or metaphorical constructions — are the norm. (6)

In the scene just quoted from *No Man's Land*, such "illogical thought processes" come dramatically to the surface. First, we see Hirst's mind desperately scramble to make sense or meaning out of his situation ("What have I said? […] But what does that mean? […] I must ask you […]"). The "meaning" is supplied by Briggs and Foster in terms which are certainly symbolic and mythical: the cycle of the seasons and the end of time itself. It is also not unusual in a dream for "post-hoc explanations" to be offered in terms which seem wildly disproportionate to the action the dreamer is observing (the falling of the sky, the end of the world), and it is common, as Hobson notes, for the dreaming mind to display "uncritical acceptance" of such outlandishness, "as though the experience were a normal, everyday one" (4). So, here, Hirst accepts his assigned "fate", ending by declaring "Yes. It is true […] I'll drink to that" (153). He does not challenge the magical, non sequitur reasoning by which a sequence of words ("change the subject. For the last time") suddenly changes, or becomes, the sequence of reality ("The subject is now winter. So it'll therefore be winter forever.") In dreams, as in some fairy tales (like "Rumplestiltskin"), once the "right" word or phrase is uttered, the catastrophe follows. In this case, Spooner is forever vanquished. This very type of non sequitur, moreover — in which words are suddenly reified and take on a life of their own — is very common to dreams (Freud discusses it in *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (149) and elsewhere.)

Such concretization appears in other scenes of *No Man's Land* besides this one, as when Hirst's use of "Gone down the hatch" in its figurative sense is immediately answered by Briggs' production of a whiskey and soda. The phrase "down the hatch" is then repeated twice, transformed into its function as a drinking salute (136). It is not just the final scene, then, which has a dreamlike quality. A look at Hobson's catalogue of dream elements (234) may help bring out just how "oneiric" an atmosphere *No Man's Land* has. Admittedly, many of these entries appear (or could be made to appear by a determined interpreter) in almost any literary work. Others, though, seem almost tangibly present, and present to an unusual degree, in *No Man's Land*[1]:

"*Inappropriate action*." Dream characters are notorious for violating decorum: appearing naked, murdering strangers, making outlandish proclamations. The characters of *No Man's Land* do not adopt these dream-manners in stage action, but they do so to a great extent through language. We have already noted the casualness with which the characters refer to excrement, and the same applies to sex and violence. This is hardly new in Pinter's drama, but it is worth noting how here, as in earlier plays, indecorum is not simply used for its shock value, but somehow *becomes* the decorum of the play: becomes that which is expected. Another kind of verbal indecorum is megalomania: we all tend to be kings and demigods in our dreams. Here Spooner casually makes the most grandiose claims about his abilities, and the most grandiose offers of salvation, to Hirst — who makes no protest. This episode also reflects Hirst's desire for a "superman" to come and rescue him from his life of desolation.

"*Familiar environment with alterations*." In dreams, we often find ourselves in familiar places which have somehow become distorted or taken on an aura of menace. Briggs' tale about Bolsover Street could almost serve as a clinical illustration of this phenomenon: an ordinary street turns into a sinister trap, "an intricate one-way system […] easy enough to get into. The trouble was that, once in, you couldn't get out" (120). (The famed theatre critic Harold Hobson actually went to the trouble of investigating this, and discovered that "Briggs is not speaking the truth […]. Bolsover Street is not in the least baffling" (Jones, 301)). Wandering and entrapment are of course among the most common of dream experiences, and here the most plausible interpretation, in context (as will be argued below), is that this tale of

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[1] See appendix p. 79.

bafflement and frustration symbolizes the entrapment of Hirst in artistic sterility. Briggs' story grows into mythic dimensions, apparently based on the tale of the Flying Dutchman, of

> people who'd been wandering up and down Bolsover street for years. They'd wasted their bloody youth there. The people who live there, their faces are grey, they're in a state of despair, but nobody pays any attention, you see. (120)

Once again there is the "uncritical acceptance […] as though the experience were a normal, everyday one" noted by J. Allan Hobson. The experience is accepted because, subconsciously, Hirst recognizes in it an allegory of his lost existence. This incident and similar incongruities running through *No Man's Land* serve also as red flags cautioning the reader that a naturalistic reading of this play is probably a dead-end street.

"*Character appears or vanishes / Time shift.*" Some sudden appearances, disappearances, and jumps take place in dialogue and description, as when Hirst recalls his dream vision of "Young lovers. A fall of water" then suddenly declares "I remember nothing. I'm sitting in this room. I see you all, every one of you" then declares "I wear a crisp blue shirt at the Ritz". The impression created is one of reverie, in its literal sense, as if Hirst has actually been traveling instantaneously back and forth from one realm to another, as is common in dreams; he even asks himself "Am I asleep?" at this point (108). Another appearance and disappearance which takes place in dialogue is of Hirst's wife. He is at first oblivious to her existence, asking "What wife?" (92); later she becomes crucial to the dialogue between Hirst and Spooner.

Most crucially, the identity of characters is blurred as in a dream. Dreams constantly present us with characters whose identities are only "discovered" some time into the dream; or are not discovered at all; or who are, somehow, two (or more) different people at the same time. Of course there are many literary works which present mysterious, uncertain, or equivocal characters, but their mysteriousness or uncertainty is almost always remarked on or highlighted by the characters or narrator. In *No Man's Land*, by contrast — as in the dream state —no query is raised when Spooner suddenly becomes "Wetherby" (complete with a new personal history) in the second act, or when Briggs becomes "Denson." At the end of the play, Briggs and Foster finish each other's sentences, indicating that they share the same mind and are facets of the same character.

On another level, we have the initial "appearances" of the characters, especially of Hirst and Spooner at the beginning of the play. Admittedly it is impossible for a play *not* to have characters "appear" (or be "discovered") at some point, and generally we are able to assume a "pre-play existence" for the characters which makes their in-play activities natural and sensible. The conversation between Hirst and Spooner, however, makes their pre-play existence seem particularly problematic or fictitious. That conversation goes on for some time before we are provided with any explanation of who these people are or how they met, and the explanation, once it comes, seems forced and unsatisfactory. Five pages into the play we learn that Spooner is a poet (82); then, some while later, that his life has been somehow changed by an encounter at a pub with "an erstwhile member of the Hungarian aristocracy," a fact which Hirst somehow "did guess" (86); that it was "at the same pub tonight" that the two characters have met (87); and finally, some time still later, Spooner's name (89): but never Hirst's. Then, in Act Two, all of this information becomes inoperative. Similarly, when Foster first comes on stage he starts by babbling almost randomly, next claims that "your host" (Hirst) is "my father," then "explains" that "It was our night off tonight." A son's night off? No, he must be hired help. And that is the explanation which ends up taking precedence. We then hear two further, equally incompatible stories about how Foster met Hirst: Briggs' tale of seeing him on Bolsover Street, and Foster's of being summoned from Bali. All this confusion makes the explanations strike us, again, as post-hoc rationalizations, almost as if the character were proclaiming "I'm here, but don't ask me who I am or how I got here; that's not the point."

In dreams too we may be well into an action or conversation before it becomes apparent where we are, who we are with, or why. We're there, but the question of how we got there is muddied. And in fact (as Hobson notes) these "explanations" of the who, where and why are often strained: post-hoc. Everything in the dream is inconsistent, distorted and illogical according to the standards of the sane and lucid mind. The actions and passions are primary, the rationale and interpretation is secondary; how often has this been said, not of dreams, but of Pinter's drama? In *No Man's Land*, arguably even more than in other Pinter plays, characters appear and tell their stories not in furtherance of plot and characterization, but because they are summoned by the emotional needs of the dream logic.

Those needs and that logic are to be found in the crisis of artistic creativity suffered by Hirst. It is Hirst who is the center of attention of the other characters, the one whose fate is fought over. Even the fact that Hirst is the only character never named in the play alerts us to his special status. The other characters may have many names; Hirst may even change their names at a whim, assigning new ones to Spooner ("Charles Wetherby") and Briggs ("Denson"); but the creature cannot speak the name of the creator.[2] Hirst is the character who represents the central consciousness of the play, the one who is giving us his dream: literally, by telling us about the drowning man and the stagnant lake, and symbolically, by having his dream characters enact his conflict with him. That conflict is waged over the possibility of revived creativity.

Since Hirst is a literary man, his representatives or dream-avatars share this aspect and all of them tackle the central theme of whether Hirst should resume his writing or not; thus the seemingly peculiar fact that all the characters in the play are men of letters or artists of some kind. Hirst is a poet who was successful financially when he was young and now has stopped writing. Spooner calls himself a poet, and says he intends to do a painting also. Foster is a young poet who has travelled to distant lands, and who has stopped writing (like Hirst) because he was called to take this position. Briggs is probably the least artistic of all, but even he has written an article to *The Times* entitled "Life At A Dead End" concerning Bolsover street. Even the confusion over the incompatible stories told by the characters may be seen to reflect the ambience of a creatively starved land where people make up stories but lack the artistic power to achieve coherence and unity.

It is Hirst and Spooner, though, who form the strongest dual identity, with their similar (sometimes identical) past histories: note Hirst's repeated "I did the same" (90); Hirst's occult knowledge that Spooner had alienated his mother by having pissed himself at age twenty-eight (88–89); and Spooner's eerie insistence that it is he who is present in Hirst's dream of drowning (109–110). Again, there are of course many literary works which use the double more or less explicitly, but it is the explicit exactness of detail, and the explicit insistence on their oneness, which suggests not just a similarity but an identity, as is found when one sometimes "meets oneself" in a dream.[3]

As the creative side of Hirst, Spooner plays the good angel in this psychomachia, there to confront him with his artistic sterility and offer a renewal. Spooner's shabby clothing, in contrast with the posh clothing and environs, is suggestive of the neglect suffered by Hirst's creative side. His name offers telling pointers about his role because of its association with the "Spoonerism," which in turn suggests both language in general and transpositions (or transformations) in particular. In keeping with the linguistic connotation of his name, Spooner

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[2] A parallel may be found in Stoppard's *Rosencranz and Guildenstern are Dead*. Guildenstern, lecturing Rosencranz on the nature of probability, starts to tell the old story about how, if a number of monkeys were given typewriters, they would eventually write the plays of Shakespeare. He cuts himself off before getting to the point, however (12–13), because a character in a Shakespeare play cannot mention the name "Shakespeare."

[3] See Anthony Suter's "The Dual Character and the Image of the Artist in Pinter's *No Man's Land*" for a more extensive treatment of the double theme.

makes one of the most quoted statements from the play: "All we have left is the English language" (80). He offers to Hirst the concept of language as the only vehicle to transport him out of this kind of Alaska. Spooner uses a chivalric metaphor in his last attempt to persuade Hirst to come back to the literary circle again: "I come to you as your warrior […] I will accept death's challenge on your behalf […] I am your Chevalier" (147). The speech reinforces the battleground motif present in the title and the battle between two sides of the psyche. Spooner will fight "domestic enemy" or "foreign foe" (147). The domestics are Briggs and Foster and the foreign foes are critics and the public. Spooner presents himself as the creative imagination that has not been dulled or subdued by time and failure. To offer to challenge death for Hirst is to offer him immortality through his work if he begins to write again.

Hirst needs this kind of stimulus because he finds his ability to create stifled: he is "in the last lap of a race […] I had long forgotten to run" (94). Briggs and Foster, representing the part of Hirst that fears to try fighting the good fight and running the good race, are there to prevent that renewal, to keep him safely frozen in no man's land. Their names, in combination, suggest the imprisonment of creative vitality under the guise of comfort and retreat. Each move of Spooner's summons resistance from this aspect of Hirst's mind, resistance which builds in ferocity as the play unfolds and Briggs and Foster heap some of Pinter's most colorful abuse on Spooner. As dialogue in a realistic drama this flyting would seem strangely overdone, as Richard Cave notes:

> If *No Man's Land* has a weakness it lies in the younger characters, Foster and Briggs […]. The audience is not allowed to enter in their individual characters at all deeply […] we are given little information about why that security is so essential to their livelihood that they jealously fend Spooner off (29).

But as the title *No Man's Land* suggests, we are in an area between battlefields. Here the battle is between Spooner on one side and Briggs and Foster on the other, with both sides in the mind trying to win over the center of consciousness, represented by Hirst. The losing side will be suppressed in the subconscious. The winning side will continue to be servant(s) of the consciousness. It is a fight between life and death, because the losing side will be "drowned": literally out of sight and out of mind. Naturally, Briggs and Foster will not go gently into oblivion.

Not only the vigor of their abuse but the timing of their entrances help underline the role of Briggs and Foster as Hirst's death-in-life-wish, personified. When Spooner first comes in and notices two mugs on the shelf he asks Hirst about other people in the house. Hirst momentarily forgets that Briggs and Foster are there and tells Spooner that the other mug is for Spooner. Following the psychomachic interpretation, we can see that once Briggs and Foster take control of Hirst's psyche he will forget Spooner and vice versa. Spooner must have been "here" before, in this recurring dream, and that is why Hirst intuitively knows that the mug belongs to Spooner. Indeed, just before Foster first appears, Spooner quotes the line from "Prufrock": "I have known this before" (96). The recurring situation evokes an atmostphere similar to that of Yeats's *Purgatory*, in which the protagonist must suffer an endless round of guilt, and it explains why the subject will be changed for the last time. Foster's entrance at this moment is significant because it shows Hirst's defense mechanism working. Foster himself reinforces this reading by telling Spooner that "It was our night off tonight" (97). The other side of the psyche is off guard while the side that Spooner represents takes the opportunity to emerge from the suppressed subconscious mind to work on Hirst.

Appropriately for a psychomachia, especially one centering on the topic of creativity, the battle is joined in terms loaded with archetypal imagery: submergence and reemergence, potency and sterility. Hirst's repeated description of his dream of a lake and waterfall, in which someone may be drowning, provides one of the thematic centers of the play. Water is a universal symbol for the subconscious, and also (according to Jung) for birth and creation

(see, for example, *Psychology of the Unconscious*, 244). Spooner's declaration that "You saw me drowning in your dream. But have no fear. I am not drowned" (110), thus implies that Hirst's creative side (represented by Spooner) is suppressed in the subconscious (i.e. almost drowned) but now, since Hirst desires to be active again — an interpretation reinforced by his cry of "Unhand me!" to Briggs (109) — Spooner is rescued. Interestingly, Hirst first says that he saw a waterfall but then it turns out to be a lake. A waterfall symbolizes energetic activity, whereas the lake is by comparison stagnant and immobile. In fact, even in narrating his dream, Hirst is unconsciously examining his alternatives. Hirst also sees somebody following him through the trees. That somebody is also Spooner because Spooner mentioned earlier that a wit called him "a betwixt twig peeper" (80) As the part of the psyche which has been partly suppressed, Spooner can only "watch" Hirst from a distance, or from "undercover."

Spooner intends to paint the picture of a fisherman catching a fish within a very lively milieu. The background of the proposed painting would be cheerful and possibly fertile: lovers, a little girl and the summer sun. Everything is the antithesis of the desolate, icy no man's land. The painting's real subject is the task that Spooner wishes to accomplish: resurrecting the fisher king, Hirst. Katherine Burkman notes:

> The subtextual battle between Spooner and Hirst that ensues and structures the play has to do with the potency of the fisher-king. T. S. Eliot's "Waste Land" imagery, with its dependence on Jessie Weston's treatment of the fisher-king in her *From Ritual to Romance* has already been evident in Spooner's vision of a potent fisher-king he wishes to paint and in Foster's one-eyed beggar (Eliot's one-eyed merchant). Now we learn from Spooner that Hirst suffers from the "great malt which wounds" […]. Hirst is not only a drunk; he is a wounded fisher-king whose potency is the major issue. (9)

In the painting, there is a man sitting in the shadow watching; the man might represent Spooner watching the finished product of his work, the resurrection of the fisher king, or the man in the shadow might be Hirst himself. Thus the painting represents two alternatives for Hirst: what is, and what can be achieved. Appropriately, therefore, the painting is described as divided into two sections, one dominated by the light and the other by shadow.

Kristin Morrison has pointed out that "there are no women characters on stage, and yet they are central to what actually 'happens' " (206). The constant allusions to sex, fertility, and poetry strongly suggest that the sterility in *No Man's Land* can be described as the lack of female presence and the lack of creativity, and further suggest that sexual impotence can be equated with artistic incompetence. The members of the household live unnaturally without any women, like artists who live without creating. Thus, Hirst's stories about affairs with women can be viewed as his attempt to populate his sterile land with women (the very element which it lacks) and to normalize no man's land and make it fertile again. His betrayal of them, the accusation leveled against him by Spooner in Act Two, can be seen as the betrayal of creativity, probably a betrayal of the muses. Even the stage setting suggests that abandonment. Richard Cave describes John Burry's set for the production directed by Peter Hall as being dominated by three features: a wall of bookshelves, a huge bay of curtains and a giant table stacked not with writing material but with glasses and quantities of drink. The setting and atmosphere makes him pose this question: "Were the ironic connotations of apse and altar deliberate? The muse had long since departed this shrine to be replaced by 'the great malt which wounds' " (19). The association between creative and sexual "impotence" is a familiar one: it has been memorably parodied, for example, in David Lodge's *Small World* in the person of "Arthur Kingfisher," the once-proud sovereign of literary criticism whose ability to turn out theoretical dissertations rises and falls with his phallus (106, 364).

The persistent and pointed allusions to impotence, then, and the characters' seemingly odd responses to such allusions, make sense as dream language about the absence, or prospective presence, of the muse. When Spooner upsets Hirst by persistently asking more and more details about Hirst's wife and making insinuations of impotence ("I begin to wonder whether

you […] truly did husband her"), Hirst first throws a glass at him, then immediately declares "Tonight […] my friend […] you find me in the last lap of the race I had long forgotten to run" To which Spooner responds, "[…] a metaphor. Things are looking up" (93–94). How does Spooner go from being an object of disgust and target practice to being "my friend" in the space of a few lines? Why should a discussion of sexual failings suggest to Hirst the thought of running the last lap of a race?

As noted earlier, it is not clear (to us or to Hirst himself) whether Hirst really has, or had, a wife. However, the reference to impotence and the metaphor of the race begins to make sense if we view the whole procedure as Spooner trying to stir Hirst up from his stupor, nudging him along on this path of creativity (i.e. repartee and fictionalization, etc.) through a shared game or competition in which Hirst must try to keep up with Spooner's creative process. Here Hirst reacts with frustrated weariness and a confession that he is not up to the creative task.

Foster, who represents the other side of the psyche, realizes the danger of what Spooner is trying to do and enters the room to interrupt the creative process. In his first speech, Foster mentions (for no apparent reason) the fact that he carries no gun and feels defenseless (97). It does not take a strict Freudian reading to interpret this as a complaint about impotence as well. Since Foster himself is a poet, this comment puts him in the same situation as Hirst. Thus, he reflects a facet of Hirst's psyche for which "impotence" is a pressing concern, the motif which "peeps through" and holds together the seemingly scattered dialogue. The implicit pun in Briggs' "Bolsover" is another reflection of this fear of castration.

A similar sequence takes place in Act Two. Promisingly, here Hirst initiates the game of fictionalization by creating a "new" character out of Spooner, rechristening him as his old friend Charles Wetherby and creating a shared past for them, and Spooner eagerly shares in the process. In fact, Hirst has tried to change his own predicament by changing Briggs's identity to "Denson", and perhaps if Briggs — like Spooner — had cooperated, Hirst might have changed the present circumstance of the waste land around him. However, Briggs cleverly ignores the new identity: he neither denies or accepts it, but goes on with his duty pretending he does not hear his new appelation. Thus Hirst's attempt proves abortive. The subject soon turns to Hirst's illicit affairs and the betrayals in relationships with women, which can be interpreted as the betrayal of the lady Muse. The episode about Arabella "consuming the male member" (134) here is comparable to Spooner's earlier discussion of his mother looking at him with "pure malevolence" (88). Women are seen as menacing, as the Muse or creativity is still a menacing prospect to a blocked writer. Once a writer creates, he has to encounter the possibility of failure and public scrutiny.

As before, at the same point, there is an accusation of sexual misconduct from Spooner, and again Hirst responds with an apparently baffling sequence of stances, first with outrage and then with an offer to "be kind" to him. Specifically, he declares, "I shall show you my library. I might even show you my study. I might even show you my pen, and my blottingpad" (136). Why would sexual accusations be met with an offer to show one's library, study, etc.? Aside from the possible phallic implication of the offer to "show you my pen," what we see is Hirst once again reaching for some sign of his old creative powers (in this case, the writing implements). As earlier, it seems that Spooner's prodding attempts to stimulate Hirst's creative side are meeting with a defensive insistence that he can unleash his creative powers any time, that the evidence of his past accomplishment is all around.

This is confirmed when Hirst immediately goes on to speak of "releas[ing]" and "quicken[ing]" the faces trapped in the photograph album (137): that is, resuming his vocation as an artist who puts life into the forms of things and immortalizes those he writes of. Spooner eagerly volunteers to help, "to put names to the faces" and aid in their "exhumation" (141–142), meaning that he can make these frozen characters (ghosts) become alive in literary work by naming them. It is reminiscent of the concept of fictional life as "life in a box," as

explicated by Rosencranz in *Rosencranz and Guildenstern are Dead* (70–71). Like Spooner's painting of "The Whistler," the album symbolizes the potential for revivification. If Spooner is successful, the figures in the album will no longer look forlorn: the sun will shine on them, as in the painting.

Briggs and Foster understand the dangerous significance of naming these characters (i.e. Hirst will regain his creativity and no man's land will be thawed), and resist vigorously. Briggs tries to silence Hirst's plans for the album by insisting "They're blank, mate, blank. The blank dead" (137).The word "blank" connotes a blank page that will not be populated by Hirst's characters. As Briggs fails to dissuade Hirst and Hirst starts talking about writing a critical essay, Foster comes in to the rescue, trying to take Hirst for a walk so that he will be away from Spooner's influence (139). Foster then responds to Spooner's offer of assistance with "Those faces are nameless, friend." "And they'll always be nameless," Briggs adds (142). Ultimately, although Spooner promises profits and minimal nuisance from the press and the public, the thought of a poetic revival is too overwhelming for Hirst. He "changes the subject," turning back once more to his lotusland, and Foster and Briggs seize the opportunity to prevent the ice from ever being broken up again.

Spooner twice alludes to lines from "Prufrock," a poem whose last words are "we drown," and the leitmotiv of the drowning man runs through the play. As he prepares to submit to Briggs and Foster and settle into the permanence of no man's land, Hirst offers a last version of his drowning dream. Now Hirst believes that he is "mistaken," that nobody is drowning in the lake. This last act of denial is only a demonstration, though, that his creative self represented by Spooner is completely swallowed under the water, and is no longer visible. The subject has been changed for the last time, and so Spooner's influence can no longer be felt. It will be obliterated from the subconscious, like a ripple in the water which will soon disappear.

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Appendix

Some Formal Features of Dreaming

Uncertain character[4] (It is not clear who Mary is.)
Fictional character, unidentified
Fictional character, identified
Dead character
Merged character
Dreamer / character displaced in time and / or place
Dreamer / *character performing* impossible / *inappropriate action* (Van does not normally perform pirouettes.)
Dreamer / character has distorted, disfigured, or absent body parts
Dreamer / *character has inappropriate* / absent *clothing* / implements (Van does not normally dress as described.)
Character appears or vanishes
Dreamer / character repeats action not normally repeated
Inappropriate combination of environmental features
Fantastic environmental features
Realistic object in the wrong place (Hardware is not normally proffered as a gift.)
Violation of natural law
Object creation
Object with unusual features
Object changes into another object (Lock becomes hinge.)
Unidentified place
Familiar environment with alterations (Williams College buildings do not normally have doors at their corners.)
Time shift (The normal continuity between the sequential acts of dancing and leaving the building is broken.)
Situational abnormality
Taken from: Hobson, J. Allan, *The Dreaming Brain*, p. 234.

[4] Items which are italicized are references to a particular dream — one of Hobson's — described and discussed earlier in the book.