

# 10 Dream Drawings (2001)

*Barbara Neri*

I had a dream very early on the morning of October 23, 1995. It is a true story. This is the dream that began it all. There were other dreams that followed the first one. But by then I was on a journey discovering who the author of the book was . . . the book that was slid across the round table to me in the dream. I completely lost myself in this process and wondered at times what I was doing researching the life and work of Elizabeth Barrett Browning: recreating her clothes to fit me, wearing them, reading her letters, creating visual art about her, writing about her work. What happened to me!

I told no one, except for my husband, about the dream. I was afraid that I would reveal some secret place inside of myself where I might be psychically invaded. It was not like any other dream I had ever had. Something was given to me. Even though I wasn't exactly sure what it was (and the revelation of that is ongoing) I was afraid it might be taken away. So the dream was kept secret for a long time. It wasn't until March of 2000 that I made the story of 'The Dream' a part of a performance in which I became Elizabeth. Even then I didn't go into great detail. And to my amazement, people assumed it was a story, that it wasn't a true dream - but rather one that I made up! Incredible! It never occurred to me that someone would think that I made it up. (Now I know what Petrarch felt like when the existence of Laura was questioned!)

I wrote down the dream almost immediately after I awoke. However, in the dream no words were spoken. One day I decided to draw the images of the dream that I had carried around with me in my head for years. I did not intend to make the drawings part of the performance (though that did eventually happen). But six years had past by and I was just worried that one day I might forget them. I almost regret drawing them because I no longer have them inside, now they are outside of me, disembodied from me.

As everything was originally communicated without words, by publishing the ten dream drawings I am restoring the dream that began it all to its original form. This reverses the journey: from word back to original image, bringing it full circle to its mysterious origins.

For those who are interested in reading 'The Dream' it is published as part of the larger performance piece that evolved over the years since October 23, 1995. It is called 'The Consolation of Poetry' and it can be found in the fall 2003 issue of *The Drama Review*.



