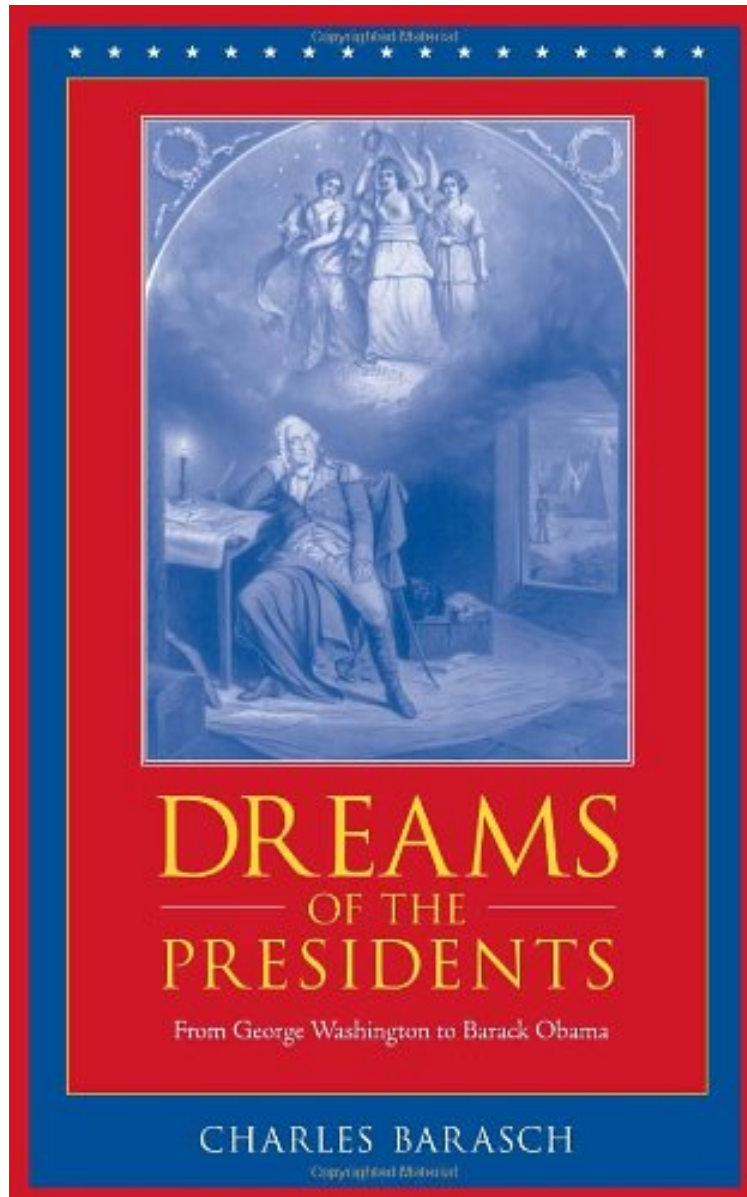


[Library ebook] Dreams of the Presidents: From George Washington to Barack Obama

# Dreams of the Presidents: From George Washington to Barack Obama

Charles Barasch

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#1655600 in Books North Atlantic Books 2008-09-09 2008-09-09 Original language: English PDF # 1 7.99 x .28 x 5.031, .29 #File Name: 1556437501112 pages | File size: 52.Mb

**Charles Barasch : Dreams of the Presidents: From George Washington to Barack Obama** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Dreams of the Presidents: From George Washington to Barack Obama:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Wonderful and creative concept, beautiful poetry  
 By Monica J. Kern  
 In this book, Barasch offers a poem describing a hypothetical dream of each of the U.S. presidents, starting with Washington and ending with George Bush. (This book was published before Obama's election, and I must confess to wondering what poem Barasch would have written for him.) Accompanying each poem is a footnote of a couple of sentences or paragraphs relaying facts of that particular presidency that help to explain some of the references in the poems, a feature that this reviewer (who is embarrassed to admit that she has forgotten a lot of early American history, especially of some of our more forgettable presidents) found quite helpful. I teach at the university level, and I think this book would be ideal for the kind of interdisciplinary honors seminar our college is always trying to offer; it is the perfect springboard for discussions allowing the application of history and social science to literature, and vice versa. But the book also stands well on its own as a volume of poetry. Particularly noteworthy is Barasch's ability to capture the character of the individual presidents in their dreams and create unique tones for each of the poems. As dreams invariably do, most of the poems in this volume incorporate the wives and children of the presidents into the pressing issues of their time, and—as dreams invariably do—a major theme of these poems is to capture the private insecurities and doubts that most of these all-powerful men must have felt. Take, for example, the closing lines of Ulysses Grant's dream: "Julia and her kin and all the slaves / point at me, and I hear / a familiar chant: 'Useless, / Useless Grant.' I cover my ears, / twirl a cigar, but it's a firecracker / I place between my lips." One of the best poems in this volume is also the most chilling: the last poem that depicts George Bush's dream of flying on Air Force One as it careens around buildings "like in a cartoon." He is having fun until he realizes that there is no pilot and he must climb over severed heads to reach the cockpit, at which point he realizes: "...I don't know how to fly, / and when the White House looms ahead, / I wish my father were here." Barasch is a gifted poet, and this is an impressive book that will appeal to those who appreciate both poetry and literature as well as American history.

The stuff of dreams—hopes, fears, and longings—represents universal subjects to which everyone can relate. Dreams take on a new cultural currency in this collection of dream-poems, one for each American president. Exploring power, as well as its limits and possibilities, linguistics instructor Charles Barasch plays no favorites, making light of the sense of entitlement and self-importance that afflicts too many politicians. Fun to read, humorous, and laced with events of historical interest, each poem gives a dose of insight into the president's life and his relationships with others, including his family, allies, and rivals. Where contemporary people or important references to American history—such as slavery and the Indian wars—occur, notes explain and contextualize them within the poem's meaning. Published during an election year, this book offers a well-timed look at politicians, some much-needed laughs at leaders who take themselves too seriously, and a fun platform from which readers can start to explore the lives of those who, for better or worse, have led America.

“With the grueling neverending election finally behind us, Charles Barasch’s magnificent book lets loose one last broadside at the insane zoo that is American politics. The conceit is simple: 42 poems, one for each president, in the form of a possible dream that president might have. The result is surreal, funny and even poignant at times.”—Dan Szczeny, Hippo Manchester  
 “The dreams drift lazily over the harder prose of the footnotes, forming a world saturated with sexual imagery and guilt about slavery and imperialism. Melancholic Presidents wander the White House hallways, grieving over dead children and spouses. Lillian Gish and Marilyn Monroe, who were half ghosts already, rub against the dreams’ surfaces. The poems are a delicious smoke curling around the Presidents; something like the fantasy air around the ad men on TV drama *Mad Men*, which could’ve easily been Barasch’s title.”—Allen Shelton, PASTE Magazine  
 “None of the dreams in *Dreams of the Presidents* is real. But they’re a brilliant concoction. And if we are ever to come to terms with the exaggerated importance we have assigned to our presidents, we will have to see these men (and women) as they are, not larger than life, but sized appropriately—and as human and flawed and brilliant and scarred as each of us.”—Nat Frothingham, *The Bridge*  
 About the Author  
 Charles Barasch’s poems have been published in many literary and general-interest magazines, as well as in the anthology *Baseball, I Gave You All the Best Years of My Life*. He has created crossword puzzles for the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and other major publications. A linguistics instructor at the University of Vermont and a speech pathologist working with children, he lives in Plainfield, VT.  
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 George H.W. Bush’s Dream  
 I’m flying a mission over the Pacific,  
 the water still as a summer pond.  
 With no target in sight,  
 I do some rolls,  
 some loop-de-loops.  
 I feel like I’m fox-trotting  
 with Barbara, the wind her fingers  
 in my hair. I guide the plane  
 just like I lead her, a promenade,  
 a little twirl and dip.  
 A biplane is on my tail,  
 Saddam in the cockpit like he wants  
 to cut in, and I try a dive,  
 but he’s still crowding me, so I pull  
 my chute and drift down over Washington,  
 past the monuments and the pool,  
 onto the White House lawn.  
 A carrier pigeon wings  
 into the Oval Office and becomes  
 Dan Quayle with a note from  
 Greenspan to raise taxes.  
 I scream, “Can’t anyone read my lips?”  
 and Barbara comes running in  
 saying something about Georgies  
 sniffing cocaine again, and I feel  
 like being somewhere else and hop  
 back in the plane, pull on the  
 throttle and we’re up in the air  
 again. I get Saddam in my sights,  
 but remember “kinder and gentler”  
 and bring the plane in.  
 Saddam and I do a hot tango  
 on the tarmac, and I let him lead.  
 George H. Bush (1989—1993)  
 Bush enlisted on

his eighteenth birthday and, ten months later, became the U.S. Navy's youngest pilot. He flew fifty-eight combat missions in World War II. In his nomination acceptance speech, Bush said, "Read my lips: no new taxes." Two years later he agreed to a budgetary compromise with Congress raising taxes. Bush also called for a "kinder, gentler" nation when nominated and repeated these words in his inaugural address. Bill Clinton's Dream I beam when Rabin and Arafat shake hands across a wooden table and, for the cameras, swap headgear. A star flares, a sign of peace, then hurtles toward us, becomes a gavel that smashes like a wrecking ball into the table, as a robed judge — I can't tell who, maybe God, maybe Clarence Thomas — intones my name from a towering pulpit. Then I'm back in Hope, a young man pushing a stroller, holding Hillary's hand. We enter a thick woods. I run ahead, plunge deep into the forest, stumble through brush and over fallen logs. I'm lost. I see a faint glow in the cedars and think I'm in a fairy tale, it must be Grandma's cottage. I imagine Newt Gingrich has devoured her and waits for me, ready to pounce. But it's the White House, and tourists jam the main entrance, so I duck around back, open the door to a tavern filled with smoke and music. I get my sax to jam with Springsteen on stage, but first sit at the bar, buy a scotch for the woman on the next stool. When she turns to me her mouth opens wide as if to scream. I put the sax in and she plays a slow number. Bill Clinton (1993—2001) In 1993 Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat signed a peace agreement on the White House lawn and, with Clinton looking on, publicly shook hands for the first time. George W. Bush's Dream Air Force One takes off, banks low between buildings, down alleyways, through tunnels, stretching and bending impossibly like in a cartoon. I'm having fun but see there's no pilot and climb over mounds of naked bodies, severed heads. I'm afraid I'll be sucked under, but crawl to the cockpit and grab the wheel. I realize I don't know how to fly, and when the White House looms ahead, I wish my father were here. George W. Bush (2001—)