



School of Childhood and Education Sciences

MA in Myth, Cosmology and the Sacred

Giving Shape to Dreams

An autoethnographic account of a creative project



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Introduction

Dreams are strange things. Whether we regard them as prophetic, psychoanalytic or merely as the reorganization of cognitive material during sleep, the truth is that they affect us. We wake up drenched in cold sweat, laughing, panting or crying because of dreams. Once I was so scared during a dream that I woke up to the sound of my own voice praying a Hail Mary. They are also an enormous part of our life. Research suggests that out of eight hours of sleep we may spend at least two hours dreaming, with some research indicating it may be more than that. (Hobson, 2003, p.42-3) This means that it is possible that we spend almost six whole years of our lives meeting strange figures, falling in love with mysterious men and women and running away from terrifying monsters. Not only that but as Robert Bosnak notes, while we are dreaming everything feels extremely real. (1996, p.10) Somehow our biology seems wired to make us believe that our nighttime fancies are profoundly true!

When faced with such a tremendous mystery as dreams, it is hard to know what to do. Some researchers like Freud or Jung have created intricate mechanisms of dream analysis, some prophets like Joseph have attempted to save entire countries based only on a dream, some philosophers like Socrates changed their lives to obey the dreams presented to them. Wherever our curiosity about dreams takes us, what many modern people tell us is to write the dream down, to keep a record, take it to the divan and finally face our devouring mother and repressed sexuality. However, I have always felt that I was committing a small crime against the dream every time I wrote it down. What about the nausea a certain incestuous kiss caused us? What about the beautiful smell a dream lover left lingering in our room? What about the cold sweat that drips off the dream onto our real body as soon as we wake up? For me the dream diary has always been by nature reductionist. We translate the dream into a day time consciousness and language. We violently twist it about in order to fit our conception of a narrative, we unconsciously decide what stays out of the narrative, and most of all we lose any feeling present in the dream. How could it be otherwise? If someone wants to write a dream journal on a daily

basis, they will probably not have the time to expose every intricate detail of their dreams as they wake up. Our own time constraints insist on boycotting our recording of dreams and because of this dreams remain illusive, hard to pin down tricksters who mock our best efforts.

I have always enjoyed dreaming but I have never been a good journaler. I tend to get bored of the task way too soon and give up on it in a matter of days. Part of this may perhaps be ascribed to some irresponsibility on my part, but there is also a part of me that dreads the idea of turning something as free and wild as a dream into a poorly handwritten page before rushing to whatever obligations I have on that particular day.

The purpose of this essay is to autoethnographically explore the creative project I have developed for the MA in Myth Cosmology and the Sacred that used dream material as its source of inspiration. This brief exposure is my personal justification for attempting to create a project that intimately relates to dreams. The creative language seemed to me a good way of keeping some of the dream feeling alive, perhaps at the expense of its narrative. The idea came to me after I heard a long lost podcast where the speaker mentioned that people in some so called primitive societies created a song for their dreams each morning after they woke up. Although I could not find a reference indicating that this story is true, the idea lingered and developed into the project I am now going to discuss.

I am interested in the idea that the best way to analyse this kind of materials, be it learning journals, creative projects or any other enterprise that deeply relies on subjective experience, is autoethnography. In a previous essay (Cortés, 2018) I have drawn heavily on Chang to justify my method of autoethnography. In that essay I refer to a quote by Chang that says that autoethnography is a set of techniques that “interweave stories of the past with ongoing self-discovery in the present.” (2008, p.140) These stories are generally recorded and then analysed in order to be brought from a purely subjective space to a wider audience. Barbara Tedlock explains this perfectly when she says that “[p]erforming ethnography produces a mimetic parallel or alternate instance through which the subjective is envisioned and made available to witnesses.” (2018, p.1475)

In this essay, however, I will also draw upon another framework of autoethnography, particularly the techniques for an autoethnography of dreaming suggested by the dream

researcher Robert Bosnak in his *Tracks in the Wilderness of Dreaming*. (1996) I will explore these techniques later but it is important to note that despite the fact that Bosnak is a practicing psychotherapist, his books are not exactly academic, although they are theoretically sound. Nevertheless, in his 2002 talk, Gregory Shaw presents Bonak's methodologies and argues that they are very interesting as a contemporary approach to dreams. It was that talk, and Bosnak's long experience as a therapist, that led me to believe his method was worth exploring.

The essay will be divided in two parts. In the first one I will describe a basic epistemology of dreams based mostly on the work of Robert Bosnak and James Hillman, and in the other I will discuss the three main phases my project went through before being concluded.

What are dreams?

There are many answers available to the question “what are dreams”, however I believe that the most pressing question in modern academic thought is simply “does dream interpretation matter?”. In 1900 Freud suggested that it was possible to create a science of dreams that could interpret them as faithful mirrors of psychoanalytic processes. The opening line of *The Interpretation of Dreams* makes this *ethos* quite clear:

In the following pages I shall provide proof that there is a psychological technique which allows us to interpret dreams, and that when this procedure is applied, every dream turns out to be a meaningful psychological formation which can be given an identifiable place in what goes on within us in our waking life. (Freud, 2008, p.7)

However, since Freud proposed this, many researchers have tried to find an explanation for dreams in the idea that they are the collateral sensory result of brain processes. One good example is the essay by Hobson & McCarley (1977) that suggests dreams are a collateral result of the structures that induce REM sleep. Another theory suggests they are the result of certain brain processes that occur while information is transferred from short-term memory store to a long-term memory store (Zhang, 2005). This means that modern academy is still divided between the idea that dreams can be interpreted as the result of unconscious processes and the idea that they are the collateral product of cognitive processes. Other functions that have been attributed to dreams throughout history (like oracular roles) naturally disappeared from academic study.

It is nonetheless worth noting that there is a smaller school of thinkers that believe that dreams are important when analysing the psyche, but who are very skeptical of sets of rules such as defined by Freud. The most well known proponent of this school is probably James Hillman, who dedicates some of his work to dreams, but avoids rigid frameworks of interpretation. While for Freud the dream works as a *significant* to psychic processes, for Hillman the dream is an independent object in itself that should not immediately be translated into a

waking-consciousness language. This is most visible in his famous discussion about the black snake in dreams:

For instance, a black snake comes in a dream, a great big black snake, and you can spend a whole hour of therapy with this black snake, talking about the devouring mother, talking about anxiety, about repressed sexuality, and all the other interpretative moves that we therapists make. But what remains after all the symbolic understanding is what that snake is doing, this crawling huge black snake that's sliding into your life. The moment you've caught the snake in an interpretation, you've lost the snake. You've stopped its living movement. Then the person leaves the therapeutic hour with a concept about "my repressed sexuality" or "my cold black passions" or "my mother" – and is no longer with the snake. (Hillman, 2008, 36%)

This quote is extremely radical because it moves away from the mainstream discussion of dreams and taps into a theory where the dream should be addressed by itself. The fundamental process of analysis moves from the realm of *interpretation* into the realm of *experience*. The snake is taken as a real person who brings a message that must be decoded as any other interaction with an intelligent being. When we meet someone we may think about the effects that their appearance, behaviour or words have on us, but we do not regard this person as the manifestation of our psyche. The type of stance we show to real people is close to the type of stance Hillman wants us to have towards dreams.

This becomes even more evident when he discusses the following example of a dream where a fox appears:

Now that fox isn't merely an image of your "Shadow problem," your propensity to stealth. (...) The fox comes into your dream as a kind of teacher, a doctor animal, who knows lots more than you do about these traits of yours. And that's a blessing. Instead of a symptom or a character disorder, you now have a fox to live with, and you need to keep an eye on each other. (Ibid. 95%)

Here the fox is read as radically other. It is not a projection of the psyche, it is a creature that visits the dreamer as a teacher, because it understands the dreamer psyche much better than they themselves do. The character of the fox becomes deeply *daimonic* and the subject-object

split is completely erased in this passage. The fox shows up because of the dreamer's inherent foxiness, but it shows up as other, as a guide, as an almost shamanic presence.

Hillman's use of language here is interesting because he seems to try at all costs to be vague in its use. The reason for this may lie in the fact that the language dreams use is in itself vague, but also because ultimately we do not know anything about dreams other than we dream them. His perspective is actually radically empiricist despite the fact most scientists would attempt to deny this. Hillman experiences the fox, therefore he believes in and thinks about the fox. This author that seems so obtuse to new readers is actually allowing himself to experience the dream for what it appears to be, which should be an easier intellectual exercise than it turns out to be.

This radical empiricism is also present in Bosnak. Bosnak defines dreams in his books through a strong negative epistemology:

I have an answer to [what are dreams]: I don't know.

But not just the kind of "I don't know" like "I don't know where my socks are" (...) but a not-knowing so profound that it makes me shiver. I *passionately* don't know. Dreams to me are a mystery and so are the inhabitants of the dreamworld. (1996, p. 11)

In this quote he shows that not knowing what the dream is is part of working with the dream. He uses this to create a specific set of techniques to work with dreams as they are, avoiding reductionist interpretations and allowing the dreamer to re-experience the dream through acts of imagination and creativity.

Despite the fact that Hillman's and Bosnak's approaches to dreams are not very attractive to analysts whose program is to create a "science of dreams", they are the only possible honest answers to the question "what are dreams?". We have no idea why we dream, we have no idea of the mechanism underlying the symbolic systems that give us dream images or even if there is one such mechanism. Frameworks of analysis as the ones proposed by Freud or Jung are guesses at best. They may be very good guesses, but guesses nonetheless. And, as Hillman so clearly points out in the passage I have quoted above, these may have terrifying effects because they snatch the dream away from us, and leave us in a desolate land of jargon and complexes with no

snake to keep us company. Not even after our expulsion from the garden of Eden have we been so alone.

The project

The main idea of this project was to attempt to work with dreams in their own terms, by giving them shape. This project had three different stages, and for each of these stages I used a particular method to give form to dreams. In the first stage of the project I attempted to create poems that captured the mood of dreams while still in a hypnopompic state. Apart from half a dozen of exceptions, all the poems were written immediately after I woke up, before being fully conscious. I kept this practice for three months until I had about a hundred poems because I have a very active dream life. From this raw material I selected twenty nine poems I liked and perfected them to create a small book that I have called *Albedo*. *Albedo* is composed by thirty poems, the twenty nine I have already mentioned and a small invocation to Morpheus, the god of dreams. Some translations of the poems can be found in the first Appendix.

The experience of writing these poems was very rewarding. It was a good way to bring me into poetry again and use an artistic language to express something as symbolic as dreams. In a way, the poem allowed me to preserve Hillman's black snake, since it clearly felt at home both in the dream and in poetic language. It also worked very well as a dream journal. The poems, even if not reflecting the narrative structure of the dreams, preserved the images so strongly that I could easily find myself in the dream again as soon as I read its respective poem.

After reading Bosnak, however, I realised that my approach was fundamentally flawed as a way to keep the dream in its own terms. Bosnak explains how generally the parts that we consider most boring or uninteresting in dreams may be the most important ones. (1998, p.30) This boredom is born out of what he calls "resistance" to the dream. (Ibid.) We want to reject that specific moment of dialogue with the dream and consequently we respond to it with boredom. The problem is that by writing poems, I was naturally selecting images and moods from my dreams for aesthetic reasons. This selection was in many ways quite unconscious and may have butchered many important points of the dream. I realised a better way to give artistic form to dreams while being faithful to them was to have a middle layer between the dream and the art. I would still need to keep a journal despite all my efforts to avoid it.

This took me into Bosnak's methodology for an autoethnography of dreams, that is mostly in tune with the purpose of my project. Bosnak suggests that a journal should be kept in order to identify certain "clusters" of dreams. (1996, p.168-69) A cluster of dreams is essentially a series of dreams where the same motif appears many times. This motif could be a specific object, like hats, (Ibid. p.189-92) a more personal one like the mother figure, (Ibid p. 178-81) or even an abstract one like death. (Ibid. p.181-86) Once these clusters have been identified, the dreamer should write texts in different genres and styles (a letter, a short story, a play) about the theme of each of these clusters. (Ibid. p.173)

In order to apply Bosnak's methodology I kept a dream journal between December 2017 and January 2018 and I identified a specific motif that emerged several times during this time frame. These were the main traits of the motif:

The I-figure¹ is a pious saint-like figure.

The I-figure is in great danger from an impious, violent or evil entity.

The I-figure has such faith in his divine mission and protection that it almost feels like hubris.

As an example I will transcribe some quotes from my dream journal that illustrate what I have just described:

Dream 1: "The evil dictator looks me in the eyes and asks me which of the rosaries is my favourite. I try to fool him and point to the wrong one but he sees right through me. He grabs the right rosary and causes a small explosion that creates sharp thorns on the beads so that I can no longer use it to pray."

Dream 2: "The monster wants to eat me and follows me everywhere I go. I know that my sincere dedication to the gods will always protect me (...) After a lifetime of running I decide to

¹ I use the term I-figure as suggested by Bosnak (1998, p.22) because we do not know if we are the entire dream or not. All that we know is that there is a figure in it we identify with ourselves. (Bosnak, 1996, ch.2)

sacrifice myself and to be eaten by the monster as an ultimate act of acceptance of the will of the gods...”

Dream 3: “João is holding me down. Afonso asks me if the rosary is the source of my happiness and I tell him no. He asks this about another rosary and I give him the same answer. He then grabs the small flask with dirt from my great great grandmother’s grave and asks it once again. I tell him no, and I warn him that he will be greatly punished if he damages that dirt.”

This dream cluster has raised many questions for me. I still cannot understand if the saint figure is supposed to die, or if he is supposed to survive despite the monstrous forces around him. This to me seems to be the fundamental question, before any attempt of interpreting the dream. Is this saint, who has both genuine faith and a corrosive hubris, supposed to survive? Or should I let him die? It is worth noting that a few weeks after this motif disappeared I had a disembodied voice experience, one of the few I ever had, when upon waking up I heard someone say “you’re not supposed to be pure yet”. I cannot avoid the notion that this voice, that I believe might have been my *daimon*, was warning me about attempting to become a saint-like figure too soon. This tips the scales slightly in favour of the idea that the figure is supposed to die, but who knows?

Ultimately I connect this cluster of dreams with my discovery of Platonism and Neoplatonism² and my growing interest in mystical traditions that involve a certain degree of asceticism. How to integrate this new found wisdom into my daily practices? How to control the desire of spiritual progression and the temptation of repressing one’s passions in an excessive manner? Iamblichus has a more nuanced approach to dealing with the passions than most Neoplatonic thinkers. He says that the passions should be negotiated through “persuasion” and not repressed through “violence” (Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, I.11), but how to accept the constant danger of falling out of the line of moderation? And what does moderation mean? Does it mean that we have to be moderate in our moderation? Where does the middle of the middle lie? All these questions only make sense if you admit to be able to understand the things these

² It has become a running gag that everything in my life connects to my discovery of Neoplatonism.

philosophers are referring to in a completely different environment where people relate to their passions in a completely different way. Is it even possible to understand what they meant in a pre-Christian era? I believe that this cluster of dreams addressed these questions that have become the center of my spiritual life. Through all of this, echoes that hypnopompic voice telling me “You are not supposed to be pure yet”.

There is another important point about this dream cluster that I only realised later on: Its main narrative is uncannily similar to the story of St. Thomas of Canterbury, the 12th century saint who was murdered in the Canterbury Cathedral for opposing Henry II’s plans of reducing the church’s power. The same questions this cluster gave me apply to this episode. Was Thomas a brave saint figure fighting for his faith, or was he a bishop greedy for the earthly powers of the Church? Who am I to know? The significance of the dreams, however, is amplified by this. The cluster becomes almost a kind of initiation into Canterbury, a mystical welcoming party where my personal concerns are mixed with the concerns that have been engraved on the land in blood. I have written a short story about this dream, based on a dream where the Cathedral is mentioned, that can be found on Appendix II.

My approach to the project changed once more when I had a dream with such an impact on me that I decided to focus solely on that dream thereafter. A description of the dream can be found in Appendix III but it suffices to say that in the dream there was a certain figure, a God of Pestilence, who was enraged and needed to be appeased. The dream ended right at the start of a public procession in honor of this god, my last hope to save my life that was supposed to end in sixteen hours due to the rage of the god. The effect this dream had on me was so strong, that fifteen and a half hours after I woke up I went to bed, because I did not want to be awake when the clock hit the sixteenth hour.

This dream reminded me of a passage of Plato’s *Phaedo* where Socrates justifies why he has started to write poetry before being condemned to death:

Then tell him, Cebes,” said he, “the truth, that I composed these verses not because I wished to rival him or his poems, for I knew that would not be easy, but because I wished to test the meaning of certain dreams, and to make sure that I was neglecting no duty in case their repeated

commands meant that I must cultivate the Muses in this way. (...) The same dream came to me often (...) always saying the same thing: 'Socrates,' it said, 'make music and work at it.'" (60e)

Upon reflecting on this passage I thought that an interesting approach I may take towards this dream was Socrates'. Therefore I decided to create a effigy of the god of pestilence and use the creative project as the moment where the procession of the dream ended. During the presentation I read a description of the dream to the audience asking them to keep their eyes closed and when they opened their eyes the effigy was on display, as if it had materialized during the reading. This exercise was extremely important for me to come to terms with the eerie figure of the dream and was a way to radically bring to fruition the notion of giving shape to my dreams. First I shared the dream with a group and then I allowed the dream to materialise in front of them, mimicking the entire process of I went through while creating the project..

Conclusion

The three approaches I adopted towards dreams during this project allowed me to experience them, and give form to them, in three radically different ways. The first was artistic and aesthetic, the second was autoethnographic and the third was mystical. I wonder if we can make a comparison between these three takes on dreams and compare them to Geoffrey Cornelius' wheel of hermeneutical interpretation. (2003, ch. 14-15) In a sense the poetry would be metaphorical, expressing through literary language the literal experience of the dream; Bosnak's technique of autoethnography would be tropological because it brought up questions of what these dreams mean for my daily practices and life; and Socrates' approach was anagogical, because it attempted to bring me closer to and reveal the will of a god-figure.

The comparison may be rough, especially for the anagogical stage of interpretation, but it is still tempting to make it. In this sense the project became a voyage through the four senses of hermeneutics and interpretation, one of the fundamental subjects of the MA. Thus, the project allowed me to embody the intellectual notions of hermeneutics I had acquired, and it became a playful instantiation of the effect your creativity can have in the way you perceive an object, in this case dreams.

I am satisfied with this exploration, especially because it has finally allowed me to establish a living relationship with the dream world that goes beyond mere journaling. It has also radically changed my intellectual perspective on dreams especially because it led me into Hillman's and Bosnak's writings, which are an antidote to the reductionism of most other approaches. More than sixteen hours have gone by, I have allowed myself to die and I have attempted to address that wound. I do not know if I was successful, but I do know that the journey has been fundamental.

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Images

On the cover

Reynolds-Stephens, W. E. (1897) *In the Arms of Morpheus*, available online at: <http://www.victorianweb.org/sculpture/wrs/29.html> last accessed on: 20/7/2018.

Appendix I

Translations of some of my poems:

Please be kind. Poetry loses a lot of its beauty when translated!

Hymn to Morpheus

Night in Odivelas

At the crossroads, a candle initiates me

In the mysteries of the dark

And the night's dew

Is not enough to put out the dream

Khthonios

The closed doors of the graveyards

Cut our connection with the earth

Tombstones glow in the night

Far away like the Moon

In our world

There's no time to count the dead.

Suspended Gardens

In the world of the dead
Tears flow
They gather on the glass floor
That reveals ordered altars
Like the suspended gardens
Of memory

I look at my childhood toys
Carefully organized
And through the mist of my tears
They look back at me

Alchemy of a white body

Your skin smells like the anise of the fields
And the snow of the highest mountains
Your body reflects the sunlight
Like the Moon

Albedo of my life
Every kiss
Leaves monsters on my soul's shore
Brought by the high tide

And every mystery hides
In the alchemy of your white body

Behemoth

I miss the time when you knew
That without rituals
Atlas will no longer hold the sky

Two hippos swim
Worried
They know the world will never be the same

Joan of Arc

A whole life to learn
How to be sung by the angel
My story somewhere else
Like a rogue dream

And every day the angel's voice calls
Illusive
And my life flows like a river

Towards the ocean
I myself an elegy
To the one who heard voices

Theurgia

In front of an old house

We allow the spirits to speak

Through us.

Tears flow from a pair of blue eyes

Moved by the beauty of the images

Leaving our mouths

Drawings sliding through the air.

Appendix II

The Queen

I look through the window into the darkness of the night. In the distance I can see my mother, engulfed in the cold damp air of her farm, illuminated by a humble light. A shiver goes down my spine as I realise she is feeding the dogs again. She has been adopting dogs and allowing them to live in her almost abandoned farm for ages. It's hard for me to believe they are anything but wild dogs. I tried to bring other people to convince her not to feed them, but everyone is too busy with their new year's meditations. I don't blame them, I blame my mother for her recklessness, I always blame my mother.

From the shadows I can see the dogs approaching, some of them look like regular, friendly dogs, but occasionally the wild ones appear. Some of them look like angry bulldogs the size of elephants. Their bare teeth omens of flesh being ripped apart. This is exactly what happens when you adopt wild dogs and let them run free and eat as much as they want in your own farm. My mother does not seem to be afraid but I can see the dogs are hungry enough to eat her. She would never be able to predict her demise, she loves those animals too much.

I run down the stairs. They start thin metal stairs but soon become sturdy stone. I run and I realize I can never understand how these hellish stairs work, where they start or where they end but they always seem to go where they're supposed to.

"Mom!" I shout, hoping she would hear me. She looks at me and smiles kindly.

"Look at my dogs, dear." she says

"Mom, we need to leave now! They will eat you!"

"They would never do that, they love me."

I barely have enough time to grab her and run into the mysterious stairs before the huge dragon-like dogs leap at her. Her eyes show some disappointment but it's hard to tell if she's disappointed at me or at the savage dogs howling in the night and invading the lower floor of the

house, where Lady Norma, a nice old lady who talked to her eggs while she cooked them, used to live.

As we get to the veranda in the ceiling I try to shift her attention from the dogs.

“Lady Norma appeared to me in a dream the night she died, you know?”

“That is not true” - my mother says. For a moment I wish I was sure enough to insist that it was.

I look at the Canterbury Cathedral, shining in the night, and make another clumsy attempt at keeping her mind off the dogs.

“I would like to show you the cathedral, mom.”

“I don’t like cathedrals. They are much like mountains. Everyone goes on and on about how the one in their town is special, but they all feel the same inside.”

“I know they do, but I think that’s what’s so special about them.”

“Maybe you’re right” she tells me “I needed to hear that”.

I smile at her and see her doze off in a newly found exhaustion.

Afonso and João are in the living room, drinking because it’s new year’s eve and I decide to join them, exhausted from everything that happened. Afonso doesn’t look like himself, he has already drunk too much and he his laughing loudly in a way that gives me chills. Whatever transmutation power wine has, it is not turning lead into gold tonight.

“I will never understand your mystical calling. How happy you are with life.” João tells me. I am not surprised, I always thought he was a terrible person but I was too ashamed to tell him.

“Well, I think that’s just who I am.”

The air is coldly ripped apart by one of Afonso’s laugh-shrieks.

“No, really, tell me your secret” João is now lying on the floor by my feet, gently kissing them and licking them. His tongue feels as warm and moist as I imagine the dogs’ tongues would have felt.

“I’m really not comfortable with you licking my feet, João.”

“Why?” he asks, but I am not sharp enough to understand if he truly is astonished or provocative.

“I find the act of licking feet to be extremely erotic, and I just don’t have that kind of connection with you.”

As I say this I decide to get up in the hope that would stop what he was doing but both João and Afonso get up as well. Afonso pushes me against the wall and yells at me:

“How is that you can keep calm when we are harassing you? How is it possible that you are happy no matter what? What the hell is protecting you?”

“You wouldn’t understand.” I say.

The look of anger in their eyes scares and pleases me at the same time. I admit that the opportunity of playing the prophet soothes my ego but I did not ask for this and I would rather be anywhere else for my new year’s eve. The fire in João’s eyes rapidly expands to all of his body and he seizes me in anger, immobilizing me so that I cannot move.

“You will tell us!” Afonso says while he looks through my small altar in the living room. “Is it this rosary that gives you your power?”

“No.” I say looking at the blue rosary of our lady of Fatima, the necessary spiritual tool for any serious Portuguese emigrant along with the small image of Saint Anthony.

“Is it the other rosary?” he asks pointing to a small plastic Rosary I bought for 50 cents in Barcelona ten years ago.

“No.”

“Is it this dirt?”

This time he is holding in his hands the small bottle where I keep the dirt of my great grandmother’s grave, my sole connection to my ancestors in this strange land.

“No, but you will be greatly punished if you dare damaging that bottle.”

The certainty in my voice was enough to turn the anger in his eyes into fear.

João, speaking for the first time since he immobilized me says:

“Well, if your power does not reside in any of these objects, the only explanation is that it resides in the cell phone you’re hiding so close to your body.”

As they take me away to discover my secret I smile, knowing that what protects me, what gives me happiness, will never be graspable to the likes of them.

I don't know how much time has passed since new year's eve when I first arrive at the Queen's court but it's already a different day. The place is beautiful, the walls are made of copper and men and women rest hedonistically in pools of running water, their naked bodies expressing the deepest lust. At the end of a hall there is a big window and through it I can see a gold mountain set ablaze by the shining sunset. Sitting in the throne, in front of the window, is a beautiful young woman and her copper skin seems to mix with the walls. Her body is seductive and the cruel expression on her face makes me want her even more. I know that due to my relationship with the gods I have dominated much of my sensuous desires, but the look of cruelty in the eyes of a woman still has the power to entice me and make the demons of lust whisper false promises in my ears. At her side, placed carefully in the window but dangerously close to the water of one of the fountains rests my cell phone.

The queen looks at me, her eyes expressing a bored disgust, while she asks:

“Will you tell me the source of your happiness?”

I do not answer but it's hard to say why. It's not that I want to keep my happiness to myself, but deep down I also know that it could never flourish in this particular place.

“Very well” she says after a while “bring her.”

Through the door of the hall I see my wife coming in naked, looking at me scornfully. I understand the queen's end game. The woman I love was converted to this shallow hedonism, her love turned into mockery, her eros turned into lust. My eyes find her eyes in the distance and I smile, pitying her relapsing into the slavery of flesh.

“I have a hymn on my cell phone. It's a hymn to the father of the gods. Play it if you want the secret of happiness.”

The queen's scornful grin rapidly changes into a triumphant smile. My wife grabs my phone and the hymn's music fills the copper halls as she leaves it dangerously close to the water once again.

“Could you please put my phone away from the water?” I ask gently.

My wife looks at me laughing and asks:

“Are you afraid of losing your connection to happiness?”

In this moment I understand that she is lost forever and smile again, sad because such a beautiful soul was now gone but feeling the fire of my happiness still burning strong in the depths of my soul.

The queen is now curled up on her throne, the music filling each present soul with delight. The sunset light touches the queen’s soft tempting face as she looks for perennial happiness. I pity the fact that I still have a soft spot of lust for lost souls but wait patiently, enjoying once again my almost messianic role in this scene, slightly trapped in my own ego. As the music stops, the queen slowly re-opens her dark, profound eyes and I ask her gently.

“Are you happy now?”

“Yes.” she says peacefully, and smiling.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, I am a little happier.”

“You don’t need to lie to me, you can just admit it had no effect.”

I try to add condescendence to my voice, but it’s somehow harder than I had anticipated. The queen’s eyes are now full of rage as she grabs my phone in order to destroy it.

“The happiness you seek is not in that phone.” I say calmly “But you have already given your first step. I can show you the rest.”

My feeling of superiority is almost ecstatic when I see the lust in her eyes turn to eros as she surrenders to my teachings.

Appendix III

Description of the Omen dream from my dream journal

The dream starts when I'm on a bus being evacuated from my city where a terrible earthquake has destroyed thousands of buildings. Strangely enough the government reports say that no one died but they are still evacuating us. Everyone is extremely anxious because it's not clear why we are being evacuated since the earthquake has already happened and people are wondering if the government is hiding something from us.

After a while I am in a huge cabin in a large field, I was put there temporarily with my girlfriend and two bankers until definitive relocation. The two bankers are quite stereotypical and remind me of communist propaganda movies. They are comically fat, have top hats and smoke fat cigars. They say they are Christians and they are criticizing my spirituality and saying that processions are ridiculous even when I point out that Christians do them as well. I tell them I don't believe bankers can be spiritual and the atmosphere gets very tense. We start yelling at each other and then I quote Jesus saying that you cannot serve both Him and Mammon at once. I tell them that their presence invokes mammon and I suddenly realise that my remark has brought something evil into the room. Everyone is scared and runs away. While I run away with my girlfriend, black and white birds fly over me. Someone approaches me and they tell me that ever since the earthquake, when those birds fly over someone it means they will die in the next 24 hours and I realise I had somehow already heard of this.

Suddenly I am in a diner with Angela and Geoffrey and explain them my situation. Both of them look disappointed and Angela says "I thought that you knew what divination was. That cannot be divination because it's too literal, it's not symbolic". I attempt to explain her again that I don't think it's divination, although people popularly call it the Omen. It's much more likely to

be a very deadly disease. She finally understands what I am saying and both her and Geoffrey look extremely worried. She asks me how long I have left to live and I tell her "16 hours".

I am in walking at night in the streets of Lisbon. I am with a young girl, perhaps 12 or 13 years old, and we are talking. I cannot remember what we are saying but I know that she is deeply nourishing to me and that I feel healed, despite the fact that I have only some hours left to live. Suddenly I become very anxious that people on the street will think I have the intention of sexually abusing this girl and for this reason I decide to look for my girlfriend. When I get to her she is preparing an effigy for a procession. The effigy is dressed in black clothes and its face reminds me those masks associated with the plague, and it is a dark green. My girlfriend explains to me that this is a god of pestilence and people are preparing a procession to it. I suddenly realise that the entire world has been thrown in a pre-enlightenment superstitious state because of the Omen plague. But I also feel that this god of pestilence needs to be appeased. The dream ends as we start the procession, singing in the dark night to this mysterious god.

Appendix IV:

A picture of me with the effigy:



