

Not long ago I found online a person I met in my teenage years. Although I did not know her well, she struck me at the time as a calm and quiet soul. I came to find many sad things about her.

She had joined a group of women who, as she put it, “gifted each other money”—an alternative economy, which was feminist “because the group consisted of women only” and defied the mainstream capitalist dynamics. On entering the group, a woman was of the fire element, and had to give her money away to another who had reached the element of water. At some point, through some mechanism she made not clear, the one that was fire was to become water and receive “that great abundance” too. In short, in what seemed to me a desperate need for belonging, she had fallen for a pyramid scheme. I later came to find she had sold most of her things in order to meet the initial payment required for entering the group, and that two years later she still awaits her time to become water—and although no fire lasts that long, she trusts her time will come, and that abundance awaits.

She was also very caught up in what I can only term *pensamiento mágico*. Every being is the vibration of a spiritual substance—A ritual was to be held involving the burning of pieces of paper with our fears written on them—Everything she believed was a bizarre mixture of a conspiracy theory, a self-help book for bored women over fifty, and *duendology* (duendología). In short, she seemed to have lost track of what was real, and to be very lonely and credulous indeed. And I could not help but to feel a tremendous compassion for her.

I was reminded of a very dark period of my life, which transpired about three years ago. The trigger is too private to note here—suffices to say a tragedy in the most inner circle of my family provoked a profound depression in me. Perhaps for the worst, at the time I was studying the work of C.G. Jung, which was so suggestive in a mind as vulnerable as mine was at the time that I secluded myself to the examination of my dreams. I came to learn that self-absorption is the finest ally of anguish. It is safe to say my only happiness at the time came from the study of mathematics and chess, to both of which I devoted myself almost obsessively. But one must be very lost indeed when chess and mathematics, which are everywhere held to be the precursors of madness, are one’s anchors. Whatever the case, I hardly remember anything of that period in my life. When I think of them, two things only stand out: a profound solitude, which nothing could ever break, and a sadness as deep as I have ever felt. Everything else is blurry and almost irrecoverable in my memory.

I was reminded, I say, that at this time I came quite close to Christianity. A stranger may think it stupid, perhaps even insulting, to take Christianity as similar to the magic ideas that seized the mind of this old acquaintance I have spoken about. But whoever knows me personally will understand the comparison is not far from true. I have never received any religious education. I have not been baptized. I had only read the bible in my twenties, out of sheer cultural and literary curiosity. And not only was I not religious, but after years of acquainting myself with the most prominent philosophers, particularly those of the XIX century, I was a committed atheist.

At the time, I spoke with two friends of mine. One was a devoted Christian, who had studied Spanish literature in New York, specializing in the Catholic writers of the *Siglo de oro*. The other was a former Christian that converted to Islam and led a highly religious life. I came to both of them with a single, unique question: how was faith brought about. I distinctly remember *wanting*

to believe—so desperate was I—but I couldn’t find a way to do so. I will avoid any detailed discussion on this: suffices to say their answers did not convince me. Luckily for me, I eventually regained my strength and became my normal self, and these religious concerns became once more a matter of cultural diversion only.

All of this to say: no one is so blessed and protected from misfortune that he may not fall prey to desperate answers for desperate questions. It is a repeated stoic idea that fortune is the master of us all—but it is also a true one. A few weeks ago, I found the word *weird* in an English ballad from the XII century—but it was used in a strange sense. Upon consulting the etymology of the word, I found that *weird*, from the Anglo-saxon *Wyrd*, meant *faith*, *fatum*, *destino*. The *Weird sisters* were the Norns of Scandinavian mythology, as accounted I think by Snorri Sturluson. These three goddesses spin the threads of fate in a manner inexorable to men. Who is to say what is being woven for him? I may find that old acquaintance strange, her ideas perhaps even ridiculous—but how many misfortunes split the distance from her fantastic confusion and my sober tranquility?