

An etymology of desire: *de sidere*, from the stars



"I think the devil doesn't exist, but man has created him, he has created him in his own image and likeness."

Fodor Dostoevsky

EMILY LYNN COOK

We rage for more, more, more, like tigers
 against the dawn:
 we don't want stripes, we want to hang in the
 sky
 like lanterns for thousands, and we want to be
 dawn forever.
 These are our dreams,
 these are our fences – these are the summer
 days
 so fleeting, fluid with colour in the moment,
 frozen crystalline in the memory,
 stiff and dull if we rush the dawn to fade
 to day, to evening, to dusk.

I let those summer days and tiger-dreams steal
 me away, once –
 I let them in too close –
 they tottered in like small children, with little
 damp hands
 still cold from sleep and rain,
 with promises fierce like roars,
 and I let them pull me, step by step,
 so I almost thought I was leading them
 into a soft world, soft and eternal as the dawn,
 with throaty promises rounding the edges
 smooth.
 Such are the seductions of promise-dreams;
 they purr into the last moments of the night.

The world grew louder, and their hands
 with eager and childish passion
 turned the green to heady smells
 and the coolness to rain that rolls a smooth
 lake into pummeled,
 hot aluminium –
 all the sweet and distanced promise
 turned into balmy, weighted dreams,
 dreams that while full in their beauty
 rub too heavy against my wrists
 or wall me in, stormfront before me, cloudless
 heat behind,
 bordering out dreamless longing.
 The dreams become fences never crossed,
 and the dreams that come after the fences are
 forever
 in the burnt-over land,
 unusable and rusting and roaring in the heat,
 casting their ripeness to the sky –
 always for sweet-smelling, never for eating.
 And there is no frontier,
 no Great Wide Open, no overgrown
 Somewhere,
 no Let's Hit The Road Baby or melodic,
 careless haze,
 only Here and There.
 Gone are the stars of yesternight, of
 colourless blue-white,

of cold winter – long dead is the spring.
 Summer heat rolls between the fences;
 it drags me with it.

And yet, still –
 who lets a heavy lull
 preclude an aimless wandering?
 Who halts the wandering before it roots
 your very desires out of reach, in the wind?
 Dogs are happy to chase their tails, but not
 we:
 we chase the dawn, the wind,
 we roar like tigers forever clawing at our
 stripes:
 little do we know they're our only stars.

Author's Note

In this poem, I wanted to explore how desire influences perception on a very fundamental level, and from there observe how desire and perception create dreams of the future. These dreams of the future can sometimes be positive and at other times negative; sometimes pushing us on towards better things, sometimes blinding us to all the complexities around us. Often, we would see these complexities if we took a small step away from our own desires and a larger step towards desire itself: the urge to embrace something, even if that something is unexpected.

I believe that this relates to anthropology in that an anthropologist has to be able to distance him or herself from self-oriented desires in order to see the structures and perceptions and motivations of another clearly. This would then, ironically, teach the anthropologist more about how desire and longing work in everyone, including his- or herself. Also, every society has its own hierarchy of desire, which in turn impacts the kinds of dreams and limitations its members are encouraged to pursue.

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© Emily Lynn Cook. ISSN 2050-778X (Online). DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2218/unfamiliar.v4i1.1088>