



VINTAGE

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THE DREAMER OF THE  
CALLE DE SAN SALVADOR  
ROGER OSBORNE

# Contents

**Cover**

**About the Book**

**About the Author**

**Title Page**

**Preface**

## CHAPTER 1: **The Wagon in the Street**

1 December 1587

*In which Lucrecia dreams* of a wagon drawn by buffaloes and carrying a great tower, of the wagon crushing the people beneath its wheels, of a person called the Ordinary Man, and of a palm for a new king.

*And in which we learn* of the identity of the dreamer, of her three dreamtime companions, of a universal belief in the end of the world, and of the ways in which dreams might be understood rather than explained.

## CHAPTER 2: **The Crows and the Lion**

2 December 1587

*In which Lucrecia dreams of* a man who brings justice to the world, of crows eating the heart of a lion, and of her own interpretation of her dream.

*And in which we learn of* the beginnings of the story of Lucrecia de León, of the preservation of her dreams, of Penelope's dream of Odysseus, of Doña

Alda's dream of the death of Roldán and of Freud's youthful fascination with a Cervantes story which takes the form of a dream.

CHAPTER 3: **The Sky of Blood**

3 December 1587

*In which Lucrecia dreams of the sky coloured like blood, of a prophecy of the king's death, of a battle between crows and doves, and of a dark eagle that watches but does not fight.*

*And in which we learn of Lucrecia's parents and the growth of Madrid, of the ominous portents for the coming year, of John the Baptist and Christ, and of how God will visit the earth only to destroy it.*

CHAPTER 4: **The Great Tower**

4 December 1587

*In which Lucrecia dreams of being taken to the highest tower in the world, of a terrifying climb down its outer walls, of the companions at the seashore and their explanation of her visions, of seeing Francis Drake in England, and of impending war.*

*And in which we learn of the temptation of Christ, of the story of Piedrola, the Soldier Prophet, of the Church's tolerance of doomsayers, of Lucrecia's desire to know the identity of her companions, of the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, of Elizabeth's delicate manoeuvrings, and of the embarkation of*

Drake from Plymouth bound for mischief on the Spanish coast.

CHAPTER 5: **Dreams of Water**

6 December 1587

*In which Lucrecia dreams of drinking from a strange vessel, of a parade of twelve women in silks, of a giantess whose voice was heard in heaven, of the water she brings to the thirsty, of a man who turns into a fountain, of Elijah and of Moses, and of the chained man.*

*And in which we learn of the location of Lucrecia's dreamworld, of the making of stories from images, of the dangers that she faces from the Holy Office, of beauty, of the place of water in an arid culture, of Elijah's role as precursor of the Messiah, and of the sense of dramatic intelligence and shifting identity in Lucrecia's dreams.*

CHAPTER 6: **The Kingdoms of the World**

8 December 1587

*In which Lucrecia dreams of being shown the nations of the world from the great tower, of the Moors invading through Navarre, of the treachery of Venice, of treason in Poland, and of the castle crypt containing the dead kings of Spain.*

*And in which we learn of France in the time of the three Henrys, of the uneasy relations between*

Spain and the pope, of the politics of Europe, and of the Spanish people's fears for their safety.

CHAPTER 7: **King Philip and the Golden Past**

9 December 1587

*In which Lucrecia dreams of a date palm on which the fruits represent the monarchs of Castile, of traitors within the Spanish court, of the lady of the castle, of the extinction of her fire (which means death), and of being told that a great evil has come to pass.*

*And in which we learn of Lucrecia's life in Madrid, of the power of the nobility and their unpopularity with the people, of the golden time of Isabella and Ferdinand, of the nature of apocalyptic visions, and of the hierarchy of the three companions.*

CHAPTER 8: **Cadiz, the Scottish Queen and the Island of Trees**

15 December 1587

*In which Lucrecia dreams of a crow bringing a leaf to Drake, of being told that the Armada will be lost, of an island in which a tree grows before her eyes from which water flows and which bears muscatel pears whose perfume fills the air, and of other trees and plants which turn the island from a desert into a garden.*

*And in which we learn of Drake's raid on Cadiz, of the decline of the Mediterranean and the rise of the*

Atlantic, of Elizabeth's and Philip's differing visions of the world, of how the death of Mary Queen of Scots led to the sending of the Armada, and of the tradition of setting dreams within gardens.

CHAPTER 9: **The Bad Shepherd**

16 December 1587

*In which Lucrecia dreams of the young fisherman who paints her dreams, of a great fire that consumes the tower and the island of trees, of King Philip as a bad shepherd, of the flesh of sheep cast upon the sea, and of a bell which will not ring.*

*And in which we learn of Lucrecia's relations with the companions, of the difficulties of dream representation, of her role as messenger from the dream world to the woken world and vice versa, of the meaning of the shepherd, of the building of the Escorial, and of the king's midsummer wedding.*

CHAPTER 10: **The Blood of the Lamb and the Drums of War**

17 December 1587

*In which Lucrecia dreams of being told of the king that is to come, of smoke and fire coming across the sea from England, of Drake's hoard of treasure, of Elizabeth of England disembowelling a lamb with her bare hands and striking dead a widow who defies her, of the insult to be offered to the king of Spain, and of the sound of drums of war.*

*And in which we learn of King Philip and the Spanish people, of the tradition of religious dissent, of flying in dreams, of Elizabeth's frustrations with her Council, of the vivid life of Mary Queen of Scots, of the Spanish Inquisition and the matter of purity in religion and in blood, and of the approach of a decisive war.*

CHAPTER 11: **The Turkish Woman**

18 December 1587

*In which Lucrecia dreams of a sea battle between Drake and Santa Cruz, of a visit to the court of the Great Turk, of alliances between the Turks and the English, of a Turkish woman who carries the world in one hand and the bloody head of a man in the other, and of discord between the companions.*

*And in which we learn of the Marquis of Santa Cruz, of the Great Turk's conquests, of the meanings ascribed to dreams, and of the difficulties in distinguishing the voice of the Devil from the voice of God.*

CHAPTER 12: **The Siege of Toledo Begins**

21 December 1587

*In which Lucrecia dreams of the Armada approaching England, of the Turks and English joining forces against Maximilian of Poland, of Toledo being besieged by foreign forces, of Philip's death and funeral, of a dark-faced man who leads*

the Spanish armies, and of a burning bush on the sea and within it a most beautiful angel.

*And in which we learn of* Spanish troubles in the Netherlands, of the deaths of Philip's wives and children, of the great city of Toledo, of Cardinal Quiroga, the Inquisitor-General, and of the bringing of memory into dreams.

#### CHAPTER 13: **The Sack of Madrid**

23 December 1587

*In which Lucrecia dreams of* the Old Man in a jar of oil, of the Armada sailing with four Spanish queens, of Queen Mary of England with a rope around her throat, of the chained man being torn apart by lions, of Moors murdering the inhabitants of Madrid, and of a miracle at the tomb of St Isidro.

*And in which we learn of* the tradition of anointing with oil, of Alonso de Mendoza and Lucas Allende, of Lucrecia's knowledge of English politics, of the Moors of Spain, and of their rebellion and their uneasy cohabitation with the Christians.

#### CHAPTER 14: **The Feast of Christ and the Pérez Affair**

25 December 1587

*In which Lucrecia dreams of* joining the three companions to celebrate the feast-day at a table clothed in white, of water which runs clear when they wash, of the symbols of the church, of

completion and of poverty, and of bread being given to the poor.

*And in which we learn of the symbolic power of purity and cleanliness, of how the king is displeasing to the companions, and of how the murder of a prominent courtier shook the throne.*

#### CHAPTER 15: **The Oxen and the Looking Glass**

29 December 1587

*In which Lucrecia dreams of being an interpreter of the king's dreams, of white oxen surrounding Madrid, of a mirror in which she sees the Infanta Isabella, her skirts black with the blood of three dead men, and of being told that she must warn the king of her visions.*

*And in which we learn of whether Lucrecia can read and write, of the curious relationship between dreamer and interpreter, of Joseph and the Pharaoh, of the charges that Lucrecia will face, of Allende's doubts about the dreams, and of Lucrecia's identification with the still-unmarried Infanta.*

#### CHAPTER 16: **The Padlocked King**

30 December 1587

*In which Lucrecia dreams of three decapitated heads, of crows eating the seed in the king's garden, of Philip padlocked to his bed by his earring, of the ice wind, of a black dog with a white*

breast, of the vault where the dead kings lie, and of Piedrola who wears an emerald ring.

*And in which we learn of* treachery in the Spanish court, of the peace faction and the war faction, of spies who act for their country's good, of the poetic vulnerability of the ageing king, and of the mind's remorseless construction of narrative.

#### CHAPTER 17: **The Moors and the Dying King**

31 December 1587

*In which Lucrecia dreams of* being captured by the Moors, of being taken to the Great Turk in Madrid, of being freed and taken to Toledo, of Allende going to warn the dying king, of a woman being stripped and stabbed by four men, of the same woman giving birth to a boy, and of how this boy, born of sin, is to reign in Castile.

*And in which we learn of* dreams within dreams, of Lucrecia's desire to warn the king, of her difficulties in appearing to remain naive and ignorant, of Philip's real, painful and ignominious death, of the Papacy in secular politics, and of the increasing power of princes.

#### CHAPTER 18: **The Millennial Year and Mad Don Carlos**

5 January 1588

*In which Lucrecia dreams of* Turkish armies in Constantinople, of the citizens of England preparing for war, of three crosses borne upon the sea, of a

coffin containing the Duke of Alba, of Alba's evil deeds in Flanders, and of a basket of chickens with women's faces.

*And in which we learn of* revelation and apocalypse in Christian scripture and tradition, of Lucrecia's task as a prophet, of the seafarers of Genoa, of the tragic story of Prince Don Carlos, and of madness among the Habsburgs.

#### CHAPTER 19: **The River of Blood**

12 January 1588

*In which Lucrecia dreams of* being told that death comes from the great tower, of a river of blood from the stables encircling the palace, of how God's terrible deeds should not be regretted, of the priests of Toledo fighting the besiegers of the city, and of how the evil that was prophesied is coming to pass.

*And in which we learn of* the problems of translating the dreamworld to the woken, of the oppression of Moors in Spain, of the theology of compassion, and of the preparation of Lucrecia for her role in the coming catastrophe.

#### CHAPTER 20: **Gout and Disentailment**

19 January 1588

*In which Lucrecia dreams of* an army of Moors armed with arquebuses, of the king in agony, of how his bedhead becomes an artichoke which is

being plucked secretly by his courtiers, and of the palace grounds turned into pastures.

*And in which we learn of* the chronic ill-health of the king, of the effect of health on governance, of the role of monarchs as governors and symbols, and of the disentanglement of common lands which turned the poor against their king.

#### CHAPTER 21: **The New Europe**

26 January 1588

*In which Lucrecia dreams of* the treachery of Diego de Córdoba, of the poor complaining of losing their lands, of three men beating back a stream of blood at the gates of Toledo, of great armies of Turks, French and English, of a man in a damask garment being crowned king, and of a poetic ending.

*And in which we learn of* the economic revolution in sixteenth-century Europe, of the destruction of prosperity by war, of the desengaño or disillusionment of the Spanish people, of Spain's economic wealth and woes, of dreams of a new David, and of the nature of endings.

#### CHAPTER 22: **The Mirror and the Sopeña**

30 January 1588

*In which Lucrecia dreams of* looking into a mirror and seeing great armies, of being told that she is the mirror in which the people are to see themselves, of the cave or Sopeña where the band

of Christians must hide, of Pastor Miguel leading an army out of the Sopeña to raise the siege of Toledo, and of being told of her own future.

*And in which we learn of* the legend of King Pelayo, of the rise of the Arab empire and the conquest of Spain, of the battle of Covadonga, of the conversion of the Moors, of the founding of the cult of Lucrecia, and of the promise of better things to come.

#### CHAPTER 23: **The Habsburgs and the Admiral**

2 February 1588

*In which Lucrecia dreams of* those who are traitors in the Spanish court, of unknown books where the pages are uncut, of a palm tree with small dogs in its branches, of the end of Habsburg rule in Spain, of a plan to rescue Piedrola from prison, and of a prophecy of the death of the Marquis of Santa Cruz.

*And in which we learn of* messages revealed only on the Day of Judgment, of the reign of Philip and his father Charles, of the Habsburgs as usurpers in Spain, of the use of the dreams as encouragements to action, and of the life and death of Santa Cruz, Spain's greatest admiral, on the eve of the sailing of the Armada.

#### CHAPTER 24: **The Dragon and the Monastery**

10 February 1588

*In which Lucrecia dreams of a great dragon passing through the streets of Madrid, of some people being swept off to Heaven by the dragon's tail while others are crushed or drowned in stinking pools, of a monastery sinking into the ground, and of a warning to Don Alonso that he should keep his affairs secret.*

*And in which we learn of the beast in Revelations, of the Bible as the model for all books, of the question of endings, of the books known as the Apocrypha, of the prophet Esdras, and of the seductions of flattery.*

#### CHAPTER 25: **The Duke of Parma**

12 February 1588

*In which Lucrecia dreams of being told that she must carry the cross into battle, of Drake hearing of the Armada, of the Duke of Parma's desire to inherit the throne of Spain, of a great fire roaring through Spain from Seville, and of how God will not renew the world more than three times and that this time will be the last.*

*And in which we learn of Santa Cruz's replacement as commander of the Armada, of the Farnese dynasty, of the brilliant military exploits of the Duke of Parma, of the Spanish involvement in the Netherlands, and of the ways in which the world is renewed.*

CHAPTER 26: **Arrest and Intimidation**

17 February 1588

*In which Lucrecia dreams of being chastised by the Ordinary Man for her lack of courage, of being with the king with a naked sword in her hand, of two devils being beaten with their own shoes, of the king being stripped and fleeing to the besieged city, and of being told to go into hiding.*

*And in which we learn of Lucrecia's arrest and interrogation by the royal confessor, of threats made to her, of Mendoza securing her release, of her father saying that he will kill her, of the enhancement of her reputation, of her doubts about the identity of the Ordinary Man, of the difficulties of narrative development with which the dreams present us, and of the notion of imagination as a form-giving power.*

CHAPTER 27: **'God Save Me, Who Calls My Name?'**

20 February 1588

*In which Lucrecia dreams of a hooded figure entering her room, of being taken to a house that is the prison of the Inquisition, of the impostor denying that he is the Devil, of a prophet in armour on a white horse unmasking the Devil, and of the Devil's plots against her.*

*And in which we learn of the problems of identity, of creative confusion in the dreamworld, of Lucrecia's family and neighbourhood, of the*

triviality of the Devil's schemes, of the necessity of fearing God, and of the dilemma that will destroy Lucrecia.

CHAPTER 28: **The Vengeful Angels**

24 February 1588

*In which Lucrecia dreams of being told to begin to retreat from the world, of the time when the people will come to honour her, of an angel descending from Heaven on to a hill-top, of the descent of 'the king's angel' who tells of the painful death of Philip, and of hearing of the words of God to St Peter.*

*And in which we learn of instructions from the dreamworld to Lucrecia's supporters, of the role of the Virgin Mary, of the assembling of fearsome creatures, of the embodiment of the sublime in terror, and of the recovery of a dream.*

CHAPTER 29: **The Fishermen Come to Madrid**

5 March 1588

*In which Lucrecia dreams of the Ordinary Man being John the Baptist, of the two companions leaving the seashore to come to her room, of a bunch of bulrushes turning from green to white, and of the two fishermen speaking in tongues.*

*And in which we learn of Lucrecia needing help and being suspicious of those who offer it, of her having doubts about the three companions, of the dispute between Philip and the people of Aragón, of*

Lucrecia's own feelings about her visions, and of a growing sense of intimidation and conflict.

CHAPTER 30: **The End of Mercy**

7 March 1588

*In which Lucrecia dreams of* streets full of stone statues, of how the Armada must sail before April and of how it will fail, of three figures of Christ crucified that sweat blood, of the pope being stripped of his honours by his bishops, of lions and tigers emerging from caves to roam the earth, and of how the time is past when mercy could be shown to the world.

*And in which we learn of* Lucrecia's qualities as a narrator, of the progress and peculiar impossibility of the Armada and of the reasons for its failure, and of a fearsome and vengeful God.

CHAPTER 31: **Hours Not Months**

16 March 1588

*In which Lucrecia dreams of* being told that catastrophe is imminent, of the king receiving news of ships from the Armada being lost, of an extraordinary conversation between Fray Lucas and the king, and of a bundle of papers that run with blood.

*And in which we learn of* Lucrecia's accurate predictions of the Armada's fate, of how the news of the Armada reached Spain, of her ability to move

her ground, and of the strange and shifting relationship between the king and the Franciscan friar as God's judgment comes nearer.

CHAPTER 32: **Wine and Milk for the King**

The first dream of 17 March 1588

*In which Lucrecia dreams of a visit from a famous visionary, of telling her visitor to warn the king, of the king at a great banquet being given wine secretly mixed with milk, of him being drunk and awarding dukedoms to everyone there, of the arrival of the prophet, and of the Ordinary Man enraged because the visions are beyond his control.*

*And in which we learn of the Nun of Lisbon and her stigmata, of the torture of the flesh bringing spiritual cleansing, of how God brings trials to those who have the strength to bear them, and of Lucrecia's role as a successor to Piedrola.*

CHAPTER 33: **The Walled Garden**

The second dream of 17 March 1588

*In which Lucrecia dreams of a meeting in the house of Pedro de Robles, of how these people have heard of her visions and are preparing for the conflict to come, of being in a walled garden with her mother, of being trapped in the garden, of escaping by a secret door, and of finding herself in a wide meadow by a river 'in level country'.*

*And in which we learn of* Lucrecia taking control of her dreams, of whether she will be fighting for the king in the imminent conflict, of the hallucinatory quality of dreams, of how one scene melts into another, and of tiredness in the middle of sleep.

#### CHAPTER 34: **The Penitent King**

The first dream of 19 March 1588

*In which Lucrecia dreams of* King Philip at her bedside, of him asking about the fate of his son, of ordering him to return to his palace barefoot, and of the depth of his ignorance.

*And in which we learn of* Lucrecia's loss of respect for her king, of Philip's role in his country's history, of the change in Spain's place in the world, of Lucrecia's arrest, trial and punishment, and of the need of endings.

#### CHAPTER 35: **The Well, the Christ-Child**

##### **and the City at the End of the World**

The second dream of 19 March 1588

*In which we learn of* a resolution to the story of the dreams, of the ways in which we see the past, of myth giving birth to history and literature, and of a dream unlike any other.

*And in which Lucrecia dreams of* giving water from a well to the herdsman of a field, of drawing the Christ-child on a bucket from the well, of taking him, with his companion, a little girl, on a journey to

the end of the world, of crossing a river and entering a great city, of placing the children before the doors of a great church, and of watching them walk away from her into the cathedral without a backward glance.

**Acknowledgements**

**Sources**

**Index**

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## About the Book

Spell-binding, horrific, poetic, apocalyptic, heart-rending, disturbing, prophetic, seditious, compelling and utterly fascinating - the dreams of Lucrecia de Leon have lain virtually undisturbed in the archives of the Spanish Inquisition for more than four hundred years. Lucrecia was a nineteen-year-old Madrilena when, in 1587, her dreams began to be recorded and published by a disaffected group of clerics. Over the next three years they transcribed four hundred of Lucrecia's dreams which they considered to be messages from God. The dreams warned of the defeat of the Armada, of the death of King Philip II, of the fall of Spain and of a new beginning under a new king - all told in bold and highly original visions. As some of her prophecies came true and as the Spanish court grew more discontented, she fell foul of the authorities and was arrested by the Holy Order. *The Dreamer of the Calle de San Salvador* produces thirty-five of Lucrecia's most captivating dreams. The imagery and inventiveness of her visions are astonishing, while the stories that they tell are compelling and of immense historical significance. Roger Osborne weaves a commentary around each dream, which allows us to see the world through the eyes of Lucrecia and helps us to understand the nature of her visions and the time and place she inhabited. This pioneering work shows us what history is like seen from the inside out.

## About the Author

Roger Osborne worked as a publisher for sixteen years before becoming a full-time writer in 1992. His work focuses on different aspects of cultural and scientific history. His recent books include *The Floating Egg: Episodes in the Making of Geology* (1988) and *The Deprat Affair: Ambition, Revenge and Deceit in French Indo-China* (1999). Roger Osborne recorded a six-part radio series based on *The Floating Egg* and is the author of a play based on *The Dreamer of the Calle de San Salvador*, broadcast on BBC radio.

THE DREAMER OF THE  
CALLE DE SAN SALVADOR

Visions of Seditious and Sacrilegious  
in Sixteenth-Century Spain

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ROGER OSBORNE



PIMLICO

## Preface

Lucrecia de León, the dreamer of these dreams, is such an enchanting subject and the ways of fiction-writers are so ingenious, that the reader may wonder whether she is a product of this author's imagination. But, although she fulfils many of the requirements of a fictional character, Lucrecia de León was a real person. It has not been necessary to invent Lucrecia or her dreams, simply to rediscover them.

Lucrecia de León was born in Madrid in 1568 and lived there until 1590. In 1587 her extraordinary dreams began to be recorded by two clergymen. On several days each week Lucrecia would sit and dictate her dreams of the previous night, while either one of these priests carefully wrote down everything that she said. This process went on for two and a half years during which more than four hundred of her dreams were transcribed. When Lucrecia was arrested by the Inquisition in May 1590 the transcripts were seized and placed in evidence at her trial. Thanks to Lucrecia's conflict with the authorities and the efficient bureaucracy of the Inquisition, these documents have been preserved and are still kept in the Archivo Histórico Nacional in Madrid.

I first came across some extracts from the dreams of Lucrecia de León in 1991. Immediately captivated by their strange beauty, I spent time over the next nine years reading the entire transcripts of many of the dreams and thinking about how they might be presented to a wider world. A book that simply contained translations of all of Lucrecia's dreams would be useful for specialist historians, but would be unlikely to be read by anyone else. I therefore

decided to make a selection of complete dream transcripts from the hundreds that were available, and to provide some supporting information that would make the dreams more accessible to the reader.

This volume contains transcripts of thirty-five of Lucrecia's dreams, all from the first four months – the period from December 1587 to March 1588. I have chosen these particular dreams for three reasons. Firstly they contain all of the themes which recur throughout her dreams, and can therefore be fairly said to be representative. The second reason is that these thirty-five dreams, although at first sight as full of diverse and chaotic imagery as any of the others, do reveal a progression. Within each dream there is a series of events, incidents and impressions, so that altogether the dreams contain a host of narratives. But taken as a whole these dreams also have an overarching story to tell. This is important because, as well as giving momentum to this work, this story is central to Lucrecia's view of the world. The third reason for selecting these particular dreams is that they are readily available in the original Castilian for those who wish to study them further (see [Sources](#)).

The commentaries that accompany each dream are not forays into dream interpretation but are an attempt to understand both the dreams themselves and the ways in which Lucrecia allowed her dreams to convey her sense of the world around her. Through the commentaries and dreams we look at the world through the eyes of Lucrecia de Léon. This gives the book an unusual structure and leads to an apparently fractured and disoriented picture of Lucrecia's world. Although the dreams are arranged in chronological order, Lucrecia did not neatly envision the world in any particular order. Her dreams and her mind looked at the world in a radically disordered, yet entirely normal way. Instead of seeing this seemingly chaotic diversity as a problem, I have taken it as the fundamental driving force

and philosophical underpinning of this book. It has often been said that we surrendered our belief in myth and tradition only to substitute an overwhelming regard for linear history and historical continuity. When we look at the past we inevitably impose a sense of order on what we see but our desire to bring meaning readily slips into a tendency to delineate and conform. By presenting a selection of Lucrecia de León's dream transcripts in their entirety and by using the content of those dreams as a route into this particular piece of history, I hope I have done something to resist the perils of refinement and to preserve the exuberance and variety and vitality of the past.

Roger Osborne, Scarborough, 2001

# Chapter 1

## The Wagon in the Street

1 DECEMBER 1587

*On the first of December of the said year<sup>1</sup> the Ordinary Man<sup>2</sup> came to me.<sup>3</sup> He called me to the window and told me to look out into the street. I heard a great noise and asked him, 'What is this noise?' He answered, 'Soon you will see.'*

*Then I saw, coming from the east, a wagon drawn by two buffaloes (this is what he told me they were), and on the wagon there was a tower. By the side of the tower lay a dead lion, and on the top a dead eagle with its breast cut open exposing its heart.<sup>4</sup>*

*The wheels of the wagon were soaked in blood and as it went it crushed many people beneath its wheels. Many men and women, by their habit and dress Spanish, held on to the wagon and cried out the end of the world.<sup>5</sup>*

*I asked the Ordinary Man, 'What vision is this that I see?' and he said, 'I am unable to say' (though seemed as though he wished to tell me).*

*At that moment the Old Man, the fisherman, appeared.<sup>6</sup>*

*I asked, 'Why have you left the seashore and come here?'*

*He replied that he had come because the Ordinary Man wanted to explain the vision, but that this should not be done until the third night.*

*I saw that the Old Man carried in his hands a palm leaf. I asked him who it was for and he said, 'For the new king who will be so pleasing to God that it will be fitting to give him this palm.'<sup>7</sup> For now I can say no more.'*

*And then I awoke.*

1. *the said year.* The year is 1587. Madrid, the city where these dreams are dreamed, is the centre of the world. A barren land on the half-forgotten edge of Europe has risen in a hundred years to become its greatest power. The fulcrum has moved west. The Mediterranean is ceding its role at the centre of western civilisation and power. Spain, sitting between the old Mediterranean and the new Atlantic, her king inheritor of half the world, her galleons fetching silver and gold from Peru and Yucátan, is drawing power to itself. Spain has been bent on conquest and adventure and is beginning to excel in philosophy, painting, drama, architecture and new forms of literature. This is *El Siglo de Oro*, the Golden Age of Spain. But at its greatest hour, when its citizens should sleep soundly in their beds, safe from the violence, rebellion and anarchy that floods and ebbs across the rest of the continent, one inhabitant of Madrid meets only paranoia and foreboding in her nights.
2. *the Ordinary Man.* The constant companion of this dreamer. It is the Ordinary Man who shows her the things that he or some others wish her to see, who takes her to the places where it is necessary that she goes and who sometimes is moved or persuaded to explain to her the meaning of the things that she sees. Who is the Ordinary Man? He has, it seems, some other identity which is hinted at but not made explicit. He himself is, as we shall see, reluctant to reveal his identity to the woman who dreams of him. We assume that she calls him the Ordinary Man (*el Hombre Ordinario*) in order to contrast him with the other unnamed figures in the dreams.
3. *me.* Lucrecia de León - dreamer, visionary, prophet, subversive, agent of sedition, voice of God? Whatever; dreamer.

Lucrecia; nineteen years old, unmarried, unlettered, still living with her parents and sisters and brothers, her curious night-life full of wonder and terror.

Each morning for the past twenty days a high-ranking Franciscan cleric has made his way through the streets of the parish of San Sebastian to the small house on the Calle San Salvador. Lucrecia has told him of her dreams, which he has carefully noted down. Fray Lucas de Allende, prior of the Franciscan convent in Madrid, has been persuaded by his friend Don Alonso de Mendoza, a canon of the Cathedral of Toledo, first to become Lucrecia's confessor and then to undertake the task of transcribing her dreams. Watch these clerics. They are drawn to Lucrecia by her dreams, which they believe to be of divine inspiration, but other things must follow from this.

Fray Lucas de Allende and Don Alonso de Mendoza believe in Lucrecia's dreams. But if their spiritual interest is pure, the uses to which they put the dreams are not. The two men believe that, if God has sent these dreams, they are not simply for the girl's wonder and diversion. They must be for some greater purpose.

4. *By the side of the tower lay a dead lion, and on the top a dead eagle with its breast cut open exposing its heart.* The explanation of the symbolic elements being transported into Lucrecia's mind on the back of the buffalo wagon is to be given on the fourth night of this vision. But there is something odd going on here. The Ordinary Man shows Lucrecia a vision and then she asks him for an explanation of what she is being shown. But if the meanings of the visions are to be explained, why is she not simply told the meanings directly? Why is it necessary for her to see the visions at all? Could she not just be visited by an Ordinary Man who tells her what he wishes her to know?

One answer is that, if the visions come from God, then the Ordinary Man has little choice in the matter. He is showing Lucrecia what she must be shown, and is then somehow permitted to help her to understand it. But this begs the question of why God traditionally and habitually reveals His will through visions and interpretations. We know that it is God's nature not to speak directly to His prophets but that tradition does not of itself offer us a reason.

The reason probably lies before us. Lucrecia's visions are infinitely richer and more resonant than the symbolic interpretations which are sometimes given by her dream companions. Her dreams are a demonstration of the value of experience over instruction. She is shown these things in order to be brought to an understanding that will be more profound than the information they provide.

5. *the end of the world.* For hundreds of years all Christians knew that the end of the world was imminent. Lucrecia's task was not to declare the destruction of the earth but to describe how it would happen.
6. *At that moment the Old Man, the fisherman, appeared.* Another of Lucrecia's three frequent companions. Lucrecia calls him a fisherman because she almost always meets him at the seashore. Here he has come to restrain the Ordinary Man and there is little doubt that he is in a superior position. The characters of the companions are consistent throughout Lucrecia's dreams and the shifting relations between the four of them comprise a drama of considerable sophistication.
7. *I saw that the Old Man carried in his hands a palm leaf. I asked him who it was for and he said 'For the new king who will be so pleasing to God that it will be fitting to*