

Angel

Whatever the nature of their “overshadowing,” angels fatefully alter our lives. Within the fire of their love lies the latent power for igniting terrifying judgment. We can wrestle with the angels, lose or find ourselves in their cascading glory, shudder at their prescient declarations. Though not always benign and often portrayed as morally ambiguous, they are irresistible. Lucifer (“light-bearer”) illuminates the paradoxical association between rebellion and the fall into consciousness. The angels in Genesis 6:2 seduce human women and sire destructive giants, yet in the Book of Enoch they also teach humanity the secrets of horticulture, metallurgy, astrology and jewelry making. Angels may embody the potentially saving or the potentially annihilating.

Who or what they are we do not know, but they have stirred the imaginations of artists, writers, mystics and ordinary individuals of virtually every age and culture. Their name deriving from the Greek *angelos*, denoting “one who announces or tells, a messenger,” angels are agents of supernatural revelation, proclamation, aid and guidance. They approach us as emissary dreams, visions and meditative states; manifest as celestial voices or choirs, human or animal shapes, male, female or androgynous, star, cloud or fire. Their great wings are tokens of access to supernal regions of knowledge and information unavailable to ourselves except in the bedazzling angelic moment. They enthrall us with the lovely subtle stuff of their “corporeal incorporeality” and “unearthly voluptuousness” (Zimmer,



1



2

1. Colorfully attired angels compose a choir of celestial bridesmaids attendant upon the Virgin's assumption into heaven. *Angels Dancing in Front of the Sun*, by Giovanni di Paolo (ca. 1403–82), oil on panel, 15th century C.E., Italy.

2. An unknown Italian artist depicts this “messenger” from transpersonal realms as a being neither human nor god, animal nor force of nature, yet incorporating aspects of each of these orders. Fresco, early 14th century C.E., Northern Italy.

120). We delight in images of seraphic aerodynamics, the sweet rapture of child angels at the manger, the glorious assemblage of angelic hosts in a night sky.

Their guardian images surround us. You see them anywhere you go: engraved in an ancient rock wall, looking out serenely or militantly from the stained-glass windows of a church, painted in ancient tombs or etched on a gravestone. Hindu or Buddhist *apsaras*, Tibetan *dakini*-angels, the winged attendants in Indian carvings, or *ba*-figures in Egyptian myth evoke them. They appear as flying spirit men in the great vision of Black Elk. Alchemists depict angelic guides in their illustrations. Winged figures of Sleep and Death escort pagan souls beneath the earth. The angel Gabriel commands the illiterate Muhammad to “Read!” and thus to assume a preeminent role as Allah’s messenger. In near-death experiences, angelic “beings of light” have lovingly encompassed the dying, returning them to life. The profound nature of angelic encounter is one of numinous insight or immediate, portentous intimation of possibilities consciousness scarcely comprehends. Angels trumpet us to religious and creative awakening; herald sacred birth and psychic unfolding. And, as shat-

tering in-breakings of ecstasy and overflow, they “dictate” the passionate words of philosophers and poets:

*Who, if I cried out, would hear me
among the angels’
hierarchies? and even if one of them
pressed me
suddenly against his heart:
I would be consumed
in that overwhelming existence.
For beauty is nothing
but the beginning of terror, which we
still are just able to endure,
and we are so awed because it
serenely disdains
to annihilate us. Every angel is terrifying.*
Rilke, “The First Elegy,” *Duino Elegies*

Rilke, Rainer Maria. *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*. NY, 1989.
Zimmer, Heinrich. *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*. NY, 1946.



3



4

3. With animated faces, two Islamic angel scribes write the names of the blessed in the *Book of Life*, suggesting angels’ ongoing and attentive interest in human affairs. *Recording Angels*, book illustration, 1280 C.E., Wasit, Iraq.

4. The fallen angels who defied their creator in pursuit of radical self-determination become inverted intermediaries between Lucifer and humankind. *Fall of the Rebel Angels*, detail, illuminated manuscript from *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, Limbourg Brothers, ca. 1416, France.



5

5. An angel prods Adam and Eve into exile, his demeanor evoking uncompromising adherence to divine law. *Expulsion from Paradise*, detail, from the *Cortona Altarpiece*, by Fra Angelico, tempera on wood, ca. 1432–3, Italy.

River

... one cannot bathe twice in the same river because already, in his inmost recesses, the human being shares the destiny of flowing water a being dedicated to water is a being in flux. He dies every minute; something of his substance is constantly falling away.

Gaston Bachelard

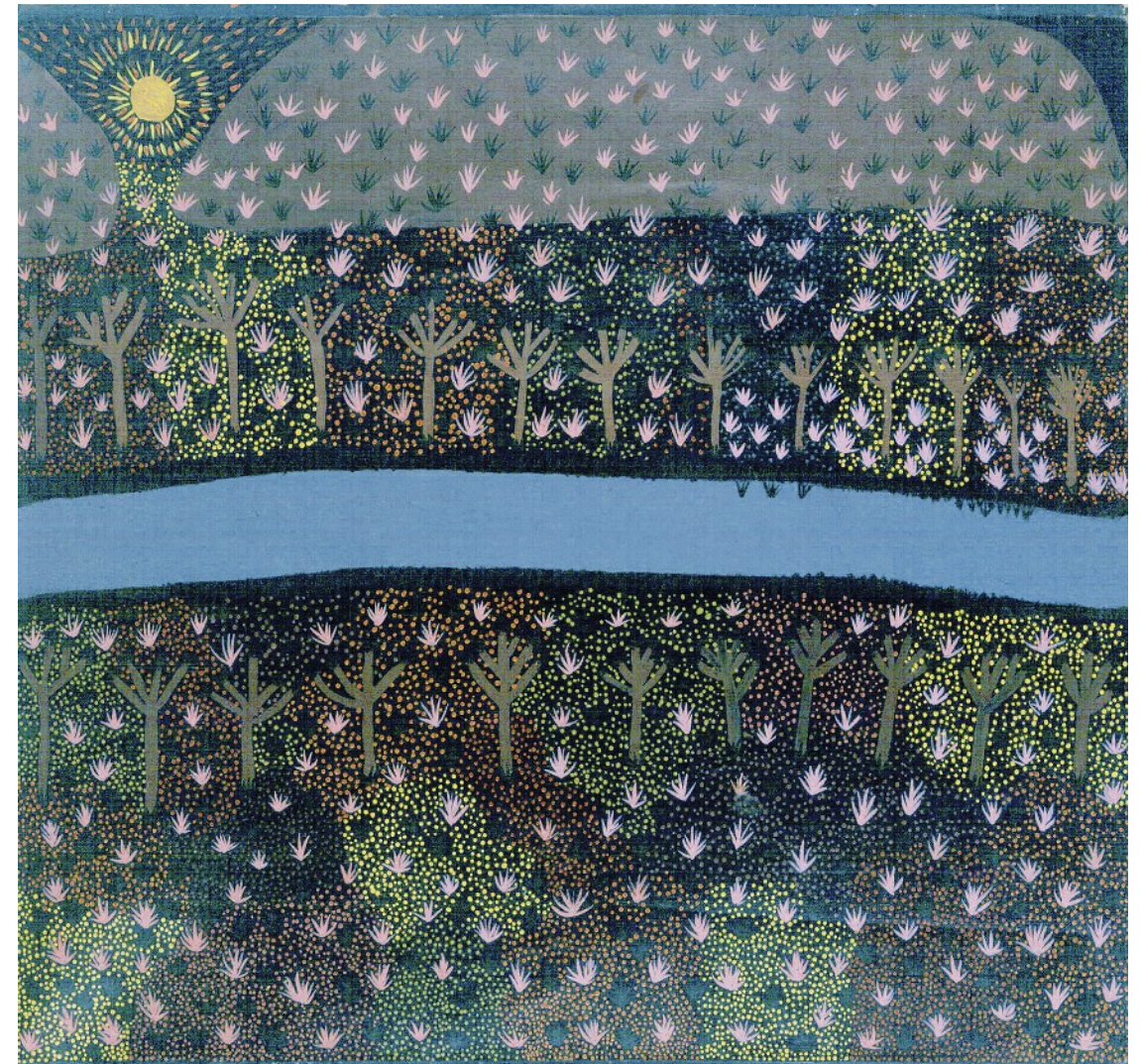
As a great fish travels along both banks, the nearer and the farther, even so a person travels along both states, the dream state and the waking state.

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad Book IV.3:18

Orinoco, Achelous, Mississippi, Nile ... Ganges, Hudson, Danube ... Styx and Lethe ... Namings of moving waters flowing between two banks, waters rolling as Time itself, as if veins of the Great Mother Earth. River is vital fluidity; the rivers move through both the upper world and the lower world, over ground and underground, inside and outside: rivers of fertility and prosperity, rivers of forgetting, rivers of binding oath, rivers of commerce, rivers of blood and rivers of water, rivers of rebirth, rivers of death, rivers of sorrow, all presided over in our mythic history by beneficent deities, dreadful nixies or changeable river spirits. Rivers have been central to civilizations locating along their banks, offering fresh or freshening water, living fish, clay, fertile soil, flood cycles and waterways as famously along the Nile, Tigris and Euphrates. The rivers have been the abode of immortals who have offered these many gifts as well as the gifts of purity, cleansing, grace and a mythic passage to the "other shore." Nefarious water spirits can just as easily take life, claiming the bodies of those who drown in swift and unpredictable currents. The river speaks of life as flow, freedom, movement, dangerous currents, drowning, running ever along, running its course, flooding, also as confinement, direction, holding, channeling. The river reminds us that we can never rise above our source; all

rivers flow downhill from their source, finally terminating in a sea or confluence. Creatures can be driven to swim upstream, like the salmon, and others just go with the flow; rivers carry things and are transporting in ways both literal and metaphorical. And rivers can run dry, their beds worn and empty, signs of a changing course or season, nature living in time. Language is a river of words ... a river of poetry and music transporting the head of Orpheus; rivers are weary, strong, flowing, sparkling, gushing, falling, rapid, smooth, heavy, bright. Everything that lives partakes of the quality of riveriness.

Mythologies speak of how the great waters came to earth as river. The rivers diverged into four in Paradise and into seven in ancient India ... waters of life flowing from the source into the world need to multiply. The Ganges, the holiest of the three holy rivers in India, flows from Vishnu's toe through heaven, earth and the world below. Once upon a time the Holy river of Ganga wound round Mount Meru three times in the city of Brahma. Then one day Bhagiratha prayed for the river Ganga to descend from the highest abode of the gods to earth and beyond to the depths that they may reach and revive the 60,000 Sagaras, his ancestors, whose ashes lay in the underworld. His prayers were answered, but the might of the holy waters was far too much for the earth to withstand, so Shiva offered his matted hair to catch the river in her descent so that her landing might be softened for humankind. She emerged from Shiva's hair in seven streams, one of which is the Ganges. In the underworld, the waters cascaded and flowed over the ashes of the 60,000, at which point their souls rose to the heavens. Over a million Hindus journey to Varanasi, where the three holiest streams meet, each year to bathe in her waters, cleansing themselves of the karma of previous lives, and assuring an auspicious rebirth. The waters of the river can promise rebirth, as the River Jordan was a baptism of souls into a new life in spirit. "Shall we gather at the river?"



1. The Dreaming of the artist Lily Sandover Kngwarreye, *Sandover River*, painting, 1989, Australia.

Alongside the image of rebirth is the river crossing, an age-old symbol of crossing over to the other shore, the land of the dead. To die is to “cross over.” In Greek mythology Charon ferries the dead across the river Styx in the underworld. The river is a boundary between lands and between the living and the dead. Crossing is a transition and a metaphor for the possibility of traveling between the mind’s two shores, the conscious and familiar shore and the unconscious farther shore.

And the river is a teacher. Human beings attempt to alter rivers to better use their power. We build dams to harness power and we straighten river courses to increase their speed and power. Up to a point, nature supports us in this. Yet, “For centuries, the Yellow River

symbolized the greatness and sorrows of China’s ancient civilization, as emperors equated controlling the river and taming its catastrophic floods with controlling China. Now, the river is a very different symbol of the dire state of China’s limited resources at a time when the country’s soaring economic growth needs more of everything” (Yardley).

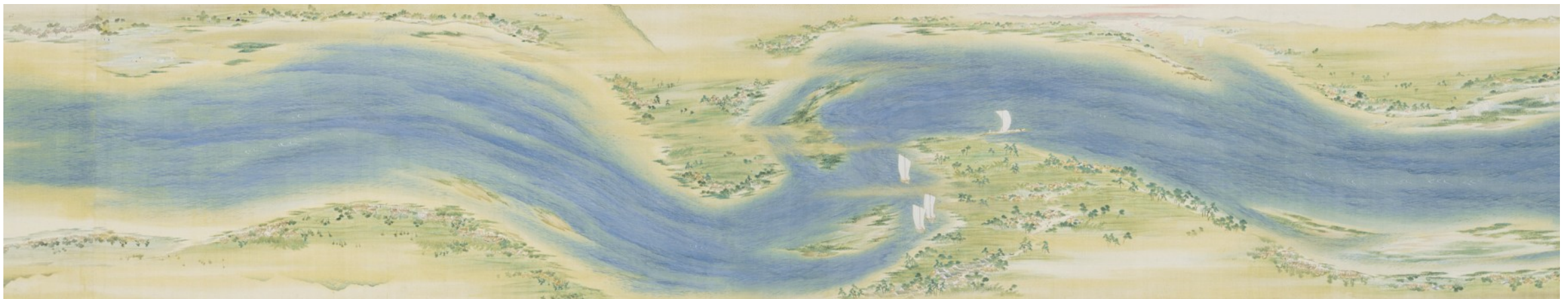
Bachelard, Gaston. *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*. Dallas, 1983.

Roebuck, Valerie J. *The Upanisads*. New Delhi and NY, 2000.

Yardley, Jim. “A Troubled River Mirrors China’s Path to Modernity.” *The New York Times* (November 19, 2006).



3



2

2. The complete scroll depicts the river from Kyoto to Osaka, one of the largest slices of topography ever presented in a continuous composition. *Both Banks of the Yodo River*, detail, by Maruyama Ōkyo, ink and color on silk, 1765, Japan.

3. The river Nile personified as a male figure, having breasts of a woman and a large stomach as an indication of fertility. From the *Book of the Dead of Pemesuttawey*, Third Intermediate period, 1070–712 B.C.E., Egypt.

Red

If color is the music of the eyes (Portmann, 158), then red would be the sound of trumpets (Theroux, 161). Concretely, red is evoked in humans by radiant energy of specific wavelengths, which increase muscle tone, blood pressure and breath rate. For some animals it is sexually arousing. These effects occur also in blind humans and animals, so “red” is not purely an experience of the eye but something more like a bath (Portmann, 138ff).

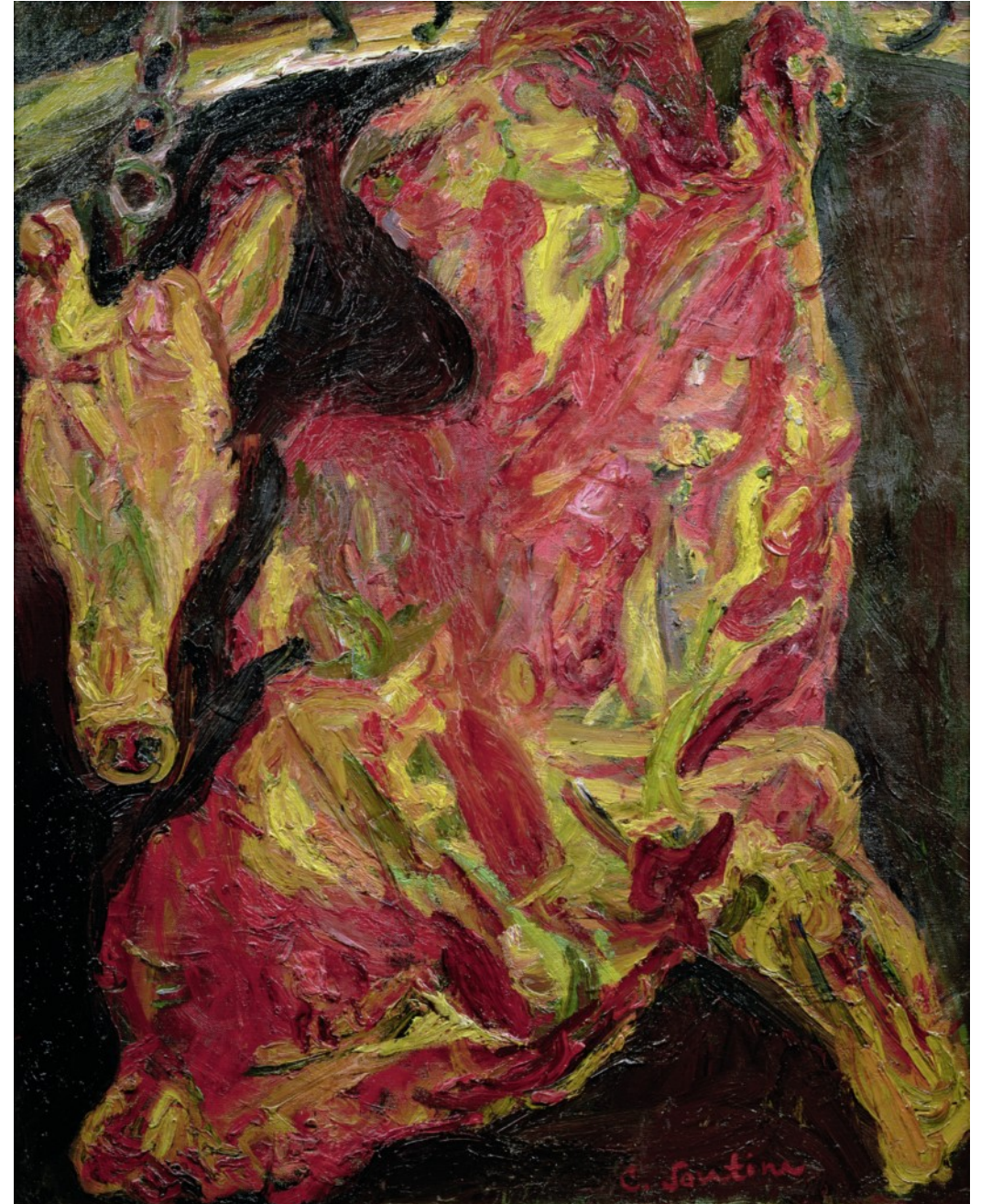
Symbolically, red is the color of life. Its meaning relates, at bottom, to the human experience of blood and of fire. In primitive thinking blood was life: When the blood left the body, it took life with it (Edinger 1992, 227). At the same time, the red flow of blood was a danger signal. The glow of fire was our great comfort and protection, but, out of control, a threat of annihilation. Red attracts us, conveying vitality, warmth, excitement, passion, but also warns of danger, calls for attention, says “stop!” In China, as well as in Stone Age Europe, red pigment was buried with the bones of the dead for renewal of life (Portmann, 140).

The color red stands at the center of our images of libido—life energy—whether sexual passion or ag-

gression and rage. The slinky red dress, the scarlet-robed Whore of Babylon, the Scarlet Letter (of adultery), the red hearts on valentines, “red-light district,” all strike the sexual chord. But we also “see red” when we are enraged and connect the “red planet” Mars with the god of war. In Africa, the warrior has red eyes (Portmann, 64), and the vengeance-seeking Erinyes of the Greeks did too. Red stands for murder, anarchy and war, fierce energy and destruction.

In Roman times, red meant war and a call to arms. The red flag was carried as a sign of defiance in European battles as early as 1600 (Barnhart, 644). More recently, revolutionary activists are “reds.”

In many cultures, red is associated with fiery intensity, ardor, daring, bravery, which can move into fury and cruelty. This aspect of red is expressed in African symbolism both by the color and by the idea of *nyama*, the potential force in all things and the bodies of all beings, especially in the blood. This potent energy fills witnesses with both wonder and fear (Portmann, 64). Red was the color of the alchemists’ sulfur, the burning energy of human desirousness.



1. Chaim Soutine's red image faces us with the tension between life-giving food and bloody death. *Side of Beef and Calf's Head*, oil on canvas, ca. 1925, France.

COLOR

The fierce energy of red is so widely felt that even red hair has been seen as related to a hot temper, irascibility, choleric temperament. By the principle of like protecting from like, a red ribbon over the doorway or a red spot painted on the forehead was protection against devils. The Christian devil, of course, was red too. Red coral protected against the evil eye (Theroux, 202ff).

And, to the alchemist, *rubedo* or reddening was the last stage of the long process of making gold or, psychologically, integrating the personality. It meant nothing less than bringing spiritual realization into full-blooded reality, lived out fully in everyday life (Edinger 1995, 296).

Barnhart, Robert K. Ed. *The Barnhart Concise Dictionary of Etymology*. NY, 1995.

Berger, Patricia, et al. *The Legacy of Chinggis Khan*. London, 1995.

Edinger, Edward F. *Ego and Archetype*.

Boston and London, 1992.

Edinger, Edward F. *The Mysterium Lectures*.

Toronto, 1995.

Portmann, Adolf, et al. *Color Symbolism: Six Excerpts from the Eranos Yearbook, 1972*.

Zurich, 1977.

Theroux, Alexander. *The Primary Colors*.

NY, 1994.



2



3

2. Not all reds have the same punch. In this painting, even red achieves harmony and balance. *Red No. 5*, by Mark Rothko, oil painting, 1961, United States.

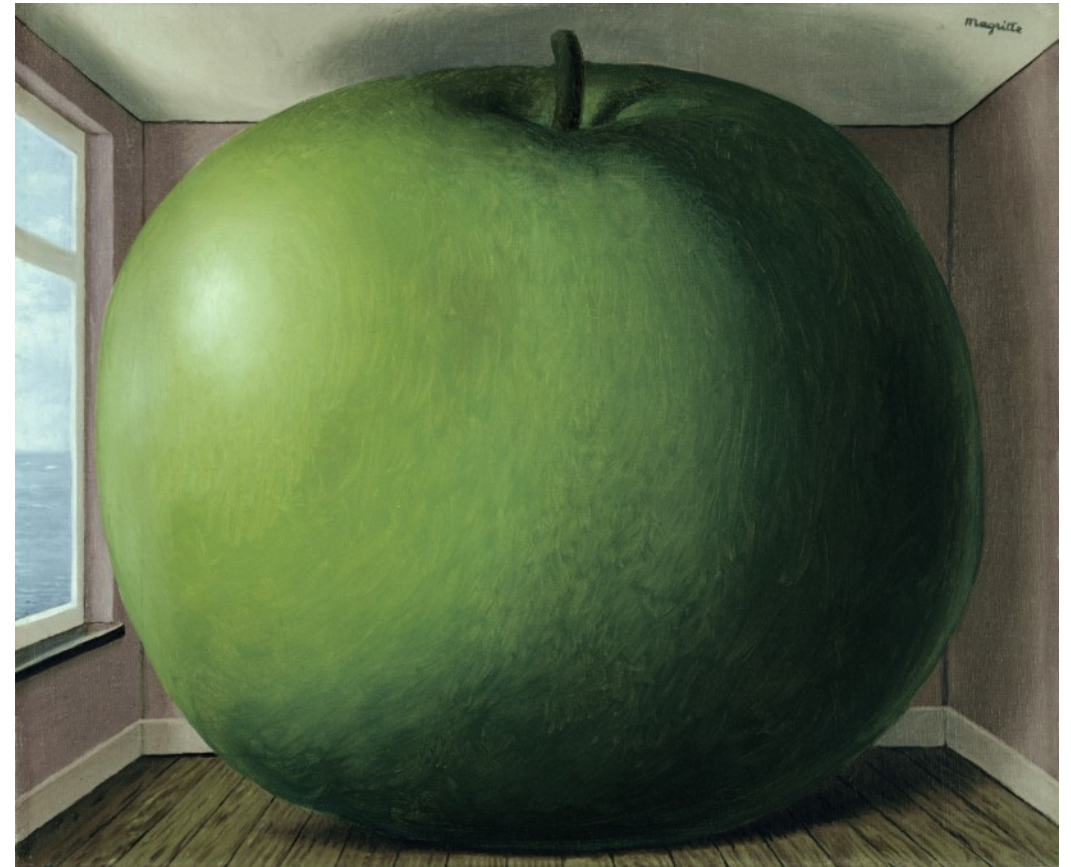
3. Red as the raging fire of ferocity: The Tibetan ritual-dance mask from Mongolia was worn by one of eight Sword Bearers in the retinue of Begtse, the war god who became the guardian of the Dalai Lama (Berger, 166). Papier-mâché, 19th century.

Apple

The Belgian surrealist, René Magritte (1898–1967) stirs our remembrance of a world of greater reality—or *surreality*—by the simple juxtaposition of everyday objects: Here nothing more than a green apple inside a music room makes the fruit’s magical qualities spring to mind. “Snapshots of the impossible,” the art critic Robert Hughes calls Magritte’s work, or he might equally have said “windows into a forgotten paradise” that the taste of this seemingly ordinary apple throws open. Concealed at the aromatic core of the gleaming apple—itsself so suggestive of life’s initial paradise and romance’s glowing honeymoon—are seeds of darkness in what is called its “ovary,” an explicit reminder of the feminine pattern revealed when an apple is split lengthwise in two. Accordingly, it served as a common love-gift in ancient Greece, where the apple was imagined as an attribute of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. The fateful legend of Paris, a handsome prince who signaled his choice of the fairest among three goddesses by presenting her with an apple provided by Eris, the goddess of discord, concluded in the tragedy of the Trojan War, for Aphrodite rewarded Paris for choosing her by presenting him with the most beautiful woman alive—Helen, the immediate cause of the war. This pattern of a seemingly innocent apple inaugurating a tortuous narrative is repeated in the familiar tale of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Although Genesis (2:15–3:24) makes no explicit mention of an apple, a Latin double entendre (“apple,” *malus*, also means “bad”) reinforced the long-standing identification of the forbidden fruit with the apple (just as Saint Augustine equated eating it with sexual intercourse) (Bendiner, 14).

A botanical relative of the rose, the apple (*Malus pumila*) goes back to the earliest phases of human set-

tlement; its present size and sweetness results from long domestication of its small, sour prototype. Today, the flavorful apples once dispersed by Johnny Appleseed as a means of bringing civilization into the American wilderness are often bypassed in favor of bland apples shipped in refrigerated compartments for year-round availability, while the fragrant taste of a traditional apple arouses fantasies of the lost delights of nature that play into its complex symbolism. Through Eve, both the apple and woman herself were stigmatized by medieval Christians as temptingly beautiful but with concealed wiles, which Christianity balanced by its belief that paradise was restored through Mary and her legendary gift of the tree upon which Christ was hanged as a figurative apple. The Jungian analyst Erich Neumann even renamed Giovanni da Modena’s “Mystery of the Fall and Redemption of Man” (a Renaissance depiction of Christ crucified on an apple tree) as “The Restitution of the Mystic Apple to the Tree of Knowledge.” He meant the name to convey the symbolic reversal of human destiny: the poignant loss of life’s original sweetness and its potential transformation through the paradoxical coexistence of goodness and darkness within the feminine (Neumann, Plate 116). The apples that belonged to the Norse goddess Idun, for example, were associated with deathless youth, the very aspect that would tempt any of us to acts of thievery that Idun ironically punished by inflicting rapid aging and death. Conversely, the apple’s reddish peel recalls the western sunset at the end of life, yet it was in the westernmost Garden of the Hesperides that Hercules gained immortality by stealing apples from the nymphs of the evening who guarded its orchard. Welsh legends describe Arthur and Merlin



1. By positioning his apple inside a room, René Magritte gives it a surreal largeness, inviting us to confront its sensuousness up close: its taut skin, its sweet flesh around a hidden core and, as our tempted lips draw near, the fragrance we long to recapture. *The Listening Room*, oil on canvas, 1958, Belgium.

traveling to a similar blessed island in the western seas to be reborn after death. This insular paradise of apple orchards (where the Grail was placed for safekeeping) was known as Avalon, thought to derive from the Welsh word for apple, *afal*. Sought out by mariners as late as the eleventh century, Avalon was finally accepted as a figurative paradise, a sign that the apple's symbolism rather than its literal historicism was dawning upon

the modern mind—perhaps a fall from the innocence of faith, but the first step toward conscious digestion of the apple's enigmatic sweet poison.

Bendiner, Kenneth. *Food in Painting*. London, 2004.
Magritte, René. *The Portable Magritte*. NY, 2002.
Neumann, Erich. *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*. Princeton, NJ, 1972.

3



2

2. Dark temptations rear their head even in animated fantasies made for innocent children. Walt Disney's classic depiction of wickedness enticing purity with a poisoned apple is forever stamped into our collective memory. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, 1937.



170

3. The fall of Adam and Eve from Paradise, the grand finale to which their first taste of forbidden fruit is the opening act. Detail from *Paradise*, the left wing of the triptych *The Last Judgement*, by Hieronymus Bosch (1450–1516), oil on panel, the Netherlands.

Medicine

A preternatural creature is seen in a vision, recognized as an emissary from the divine realm and its physical likeness procured to become a container of healing energy. The eagle medicine bundle of the Crow Indians of southern Montana could not present a more striking contrast to the medicine of multicolored capsules, chemotherapies and synthetic drugs. Yet the medicine of both has its origin and potency in nature—the vital force of animals, embodied in skin, fang, talon, feather, horn and fur, the paradoxical *pharmakon*, both remedy and poison, the curative properties of minerals and plants. Human beings discovered by trial and error nature's vast cornucopia of palliatives and made infusions from leaves, roots and oils, unguents to rub on fevered skin or salve a wound, and mysterious and effective decoctions. Spirit as much as substance, medicine was also the felt bivalent power of particular objects and individuals—medicine people, shamans,

witches, herbalists, midwives and physicians—and the deities that directed them. Chiron, the centaur and wounded healer of ancient Greece, expresses consciousness rooted in the body, and reveals the medicinal seeds of light in the psychosomatic darkness. Asclepius evokes the healing bite of psyche's daemonic "snake" as dream, reflection, meaning and insight. Egyptian Isis mediates the transmutation of venom into antidote. The healing principles of the East unfold in the transformation of subtle body centers, the nuanced shifting of organic fluids and the restoration of balance and flow. Alchemy's *medicina* is seeding and emergence, occult understanding and the mystery of dead matter becoming new psychic tissue. Medicine is coincidence and correspondence, lapis and goal, the panacea, elixir or balm. But medicine is also the stuff that's hard to take but must be swallowed, can sicken before it relieves, must be survived before it can save.



Eagle medicine bundle, Crow Tribe,
Plains Indians.

Goat

And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness.
Leviticus 16:22

Yes, I've fallen in love! ... Hopelessly! ... I fought against it ... fought hard ... She's a goat; Sylvia is a goat ... There she was, just looking at me, with those eyes of hers ...
Edward Albee, *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?*
(Notes Toward a Definition of Tragedy)

Unlike its cousin, the cooperative sheep, the goat is a cunning and intelligent creature hard to contain, feisty and temperamental, oftentimes funny, independent and, in a word, capricious (from the Latin *capra*, "goat"). The wild goat scrambles nimbly up the craggiest and most treacherous mountainscapes to graze upon the heights and when domesticated thrives with a built-to-suit barnyard knoll on which to perch. They can and will scale nearly any fence, turn up on the roof or even climb upon the backs of other animals. "Never turn your back on a billy goat," the saying goes, or you might get a surprise butt in the behind.

When a goat gives you that uncanny look of theirs, they seem to plot and muse with humanlike design from an alien source. Those strange light eyes, furnished with a long rectangular pupil, lend them a spooky look, but provide them with wide-angle perception and acute night vision. Many of their rowdy and otherworldly qualities, including their ability to leap as if to fly, have associated the goat with darkness and un-

tamed passions, yet this wild ruminant has become one of the most nurturing of domesticated animals, providing milk, meat, fleece and skins to human beings. Zeus himself was suckled by the goat Amalthea. His legendary protective aegis was fashioned from Amalthea's skin, and her horn was the cornucopia of ever flowing abundance. The goat, nanny or billy, has been associated universally with fertility or potent virility, respectively. In Norse mythology this extends to the mystical ability to regenerate; Thor's chariot is drawn by two magic goats who can be cooked and eaten for dinner and return anew by morning if skin and bones are kept intact. The Norse tradition also associates the goat with protectiveness as in the famous tale "Three Billy Goats Gruff," in which a wily goat outwits a terrible troll living under a bridge.

Yet, the Judeo-Christian West has projected on the rutting billy goat's compulsive sexual drive and strong odor, together with its independence and strange look, the very devil as a black goat-man with human body, a bearded and horned goat's head and hooves, typifying carnal lust and black magic. Upon the scapegoat in Judaic lore and elsewhere, sins, shame or illness were magically transferred and it was then loosed in the wilderness. Psychological scapegoating defeats creative psychological growth, for the difficult conscious apprehension of shadows within fertilizes individuation and the ability to love, a wisdom reflected in the mythical image of the goat as the favored mount of the goddess Aphrodite. Her image later morphed into the fantasy of an evil witch traveling through the moonlit woods on a flying goat to a secret place of worship.



1



2

1. The he-goat, portrayed as the devil, presides over a band of wild-eyed peasants at a Sabbath, which in Goya's enlightened era would be considered an image of the mind succumbing to evil. *The Great He-Goat: Witches Sabbath*, by Francisco de Goya, oil on canvas, 1820–23, Spain.

2. The Arcadian goat-god of lust and life speaks to the animal in all of us, blurring the neat boundary between civilization and the wild. *Pan and a Goat*, from the Villa dei Papiri in Herculaneum, Roman, 1st century C.E.

The wild, lusty and independent billy goat was the inspiration for the Greek figure of Pan, the lecherous “old goat” god of the pastures of Arcadia who compels untamed earthly passions and stirs insatiable desires and panic in the wilderness of the mind. Worshipped in nature, he is a god of renewal and if the civilized human being can consciously reflect on what Pan stirs up, the god can inspire living passionate sexuality. Otherwise he can manifest in unconsciously compelled rape, sexual compulsions of all kinds and lust for power. The process of civilization was portrayed in the story of the goat-man Marsyas who was flayed by the more civilizing figure of Apollo for daring to challenge the order-bearing god to a musical contest and losing. Yet we can only take so much order and reasonable goodness before we become vulnerable to Pan’s seduction. Pan shares his randy goat-ness with similar figures such as

the Satyrs, the Sileni (who often accompany Dionysus) and Priapus. Dionysus, to whom goats were sacrificed, was the god of tragedy, or “goat song,” from the Greek *tragos*, “goat,” since the poetic forms of tragedy originated with the dithyrambic satyr play in honor of the god. Perhaps the goat association is also apt in the sense that by way of unconsciously stimulating lustful and aggressive drives into action, the Dionysian can unfold in the fatal and mad undoing of an otherwise civilized hero. The fear of such unbound passions has led some to equate them with evil. The good sheep stay with the flock, pasture peacefully in the valley and follow along, while the potent, feisty, wild and striving goat of our imagination stirs trouble and follows his own often shameless lead, at the same time often attaining the highest heights.



3



4

3. This ancient image of a billy goat seems remarkable for its gentleness and grace in contrast to other more modern images, which accentuate the coarse and lustful. *Billy Goat*, detail, relief, ca. 2551–2528 B.C.E., Old Kingdom, Reign of Khufu, Egypt.

4. The form for the casting of this famous nanny goat was fashioned from discarded found objects. *The Goat*, by Pablo Picasso, 1950.

Cradle

For the child, poet or visionary artist the world is full of wonder: The crescent moon becomes the foot of a cradle and the stars the lamps of the sky. In this image, the Virgin Mary as the Queen of Heaven, is surprisingly depicted seated in a domestic setting, her foot tapping the crescent moon, as if recording time, while cradling her radiant child, whose birth coincides with the returning light of the sun. Her breath and heartbeat are the rhythms of nature, like the cycles of the sun and the moon and the waves of the sea. The womb of the mother is the child's first cradle, from which it is born. The cradle complements the coffin, which carries the dead to the afterlife. Mythically, it is the cosmic barque on the primordial ocean. All life once emerged from the sea, "out of the cradle endlessly rocking" as in the famous poem by Walt Whitman. The fertile land between the Euphrates and the Tigris rivers in the Near East is called the "cradle of civilization," where the yearly rounds of labors gave birth to culture. The recurring familiar movements of the cradle soothe

us like a lullaby (also called cradle song) and reassure us that we are safe. At each turn, however, there is a moment when everything stands still, when the cradling arm may lose its grip, the wave bring us under or the night swallow us up. This is probably how ritual was born—to carry us through the uncertainties before any new undertaking. We pray then that Mother Nature will continue to hold us and protect us in her cradle.

*I am going to sleep, nurse, put me to bed.
Put a lamp at the headboard;
a constellation, whichever one you like;
they're all nice; turn it down a little.
...
a celestial foot is rocking you from above
and a bird is tapping out some rhythms*

Alfonsina Storni, *I'm Going to Sleep*



The Virgin cradling the Christ Child in her arms. The crescent moon at her feet goes back to Isis as the Queen of Heaven. Painting, Flemish, 13th century.