

The Bridge

Bridget Morpurgo

Aras summarizes the symbol of the bridge:

Seeming to overarch the rising moon, a bridge connects the ascending cliffs on either side of a river, bringing into relationship clusters of huts, fishing boats and majestic nature. Bridge is structure and pathway, a linking of opposing sides of a landscape often separated by a void. The latter may take many forms: the depths of river, lake or waterfall; a chasm in the earth, the gap between two people, given differences in language, personality or goals; the mythologized breach between heaven and earth, conscious and unconscious, time and eternity. To the ancients, a river or its equivalent represented a natural divide, a divinely ordained boundary setting apart territories in the possession of different forces. The building of a bridge was *contra naturam*, and required sacrifices to resident spirits and deities. Bridge still carries the potency of transgression and abyss.

Despite its anchoring, a bridge looks suspended, is subject to collapse and associated with hangings and suicides. The motif of the "perilous bridge" is very widespread. Only gods can traverse the rainbow bridge; humans must pass under. Or,

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in shamanic traditions, it is the initiated shaman, as master of death and retriever of the soul, who alone can bridge into the spirit world and return to human embodiment. In medieval romances, the drawbridge of the magic castle leads into mortal dangers that test the virtue of the knight. Islam, Hinduism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism all have variants of the bridge to Paradise.

Exemplary lives of faithfulness or sacrificial gifts bestow a worthiness that wins safe passage; unworthy individuals fall into Hell or the hands of the Evil One. Psyche appears to support the separation of conscious from the unconscious, but also a bridging that brings them into creative relationship. The ego, unwilling to sacrifice hard-won defenses and fearing the dangers of the void, is often chary of such a bridging. Yet psyche offers guidance in the crossing: unconscious projections that compel libido toward conscious goals; dreams that illuminate the background of interior experience and outer event, the moonlike nature of feeling that blurs unequal opposites into correspondence and parity.



Image 1

A bridge connects two opposing, separate places. {Image 1} As an image, the bridge is a unifying symbol that creates a pathway between two ways of thinking, living, perceiving. Below the bridge is a watery abyss, a void, an uncertain plunge into the depths. I was led to the symbol of a bridge first because of my name. I have felt that my parents named me Bridget with an unconscious wish that I would act in my family with many of the functions of a bridge.

Jung referred to Goethe's Faust as "the most recent pillar in that bridge of the spirit which spans the morass of world history " Jung (1932). Morass basically means

swamp land. Figuratively it means a complicated, confused situation. Jung's suggests that stories such as Faust can form a bridge over the marshland, the muddy, damp depths of the psyche. The places we fear to travel without the structure of a bridge beneath us to help us move from one place to the next.

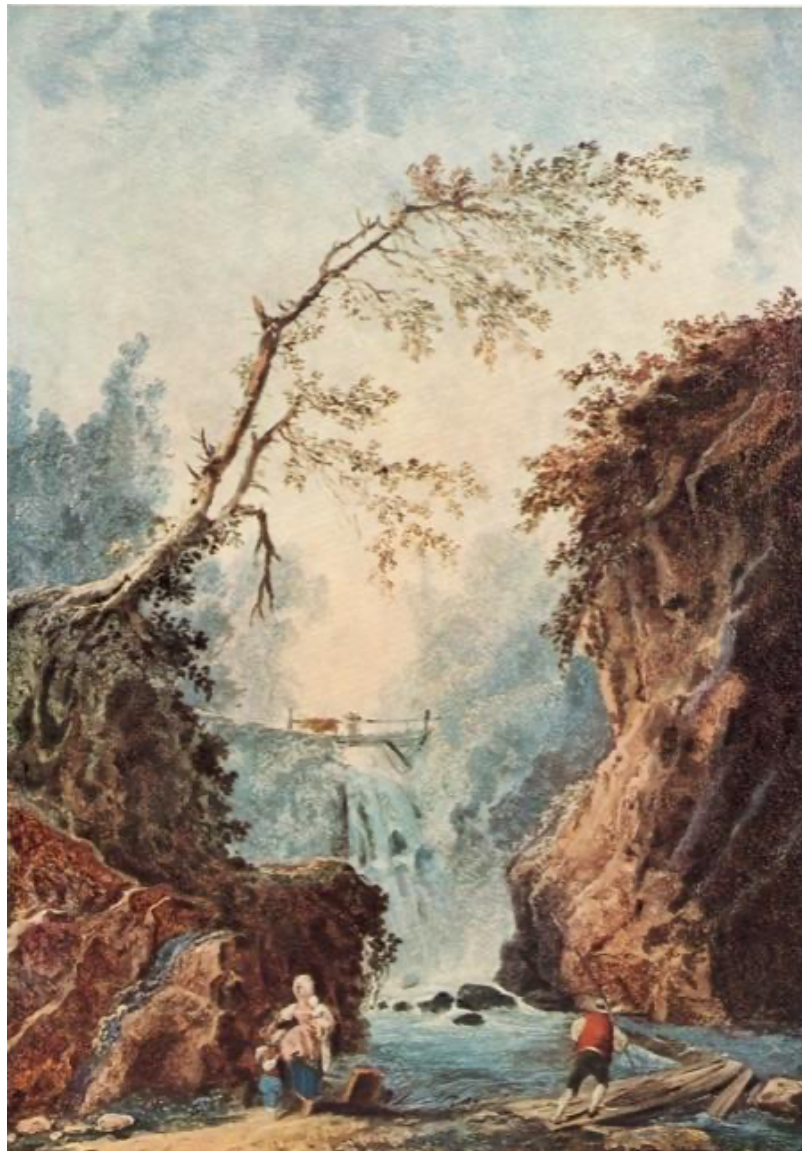


Image 2

The bridge evokes transition and travel. {Image 2} The structure literally allows for travel from one place to another, often in a place where nature has erected a barrier

to that passage, making the bridge *contra naturam*, or against the natural order. {Image

3) For this reason, followers of Neptune and Poseidon gave rise to priests whose role it was to appease the spirits of the river.



Image 3

By building a bridge, they believed man would upset the spirits by placing them below his own feet. The priests would gather reeds and construct 27 puppets, which they would throw into the river. This ritual was intended to signify drowning men, in the hopes that the river would be satisfied with the puppets and spare the people of the town.



Image 4

This idea of spirits and gods is also seen in the rainbow bridge. (Image 4) After the flood, God made the rainbow to signify the end of one era and the beginning of the next, along with a promise that He would never again destroy the earth with a flood. The rainbow bridge spans from the earth to the heavens, with man on one side and the gods on the other. (Image 5) On a symbolic level, bridges often depict this spiritual divide between spirit and the material world; between the town and the church (signifying secular and spiritual worlds), earth and heaven.

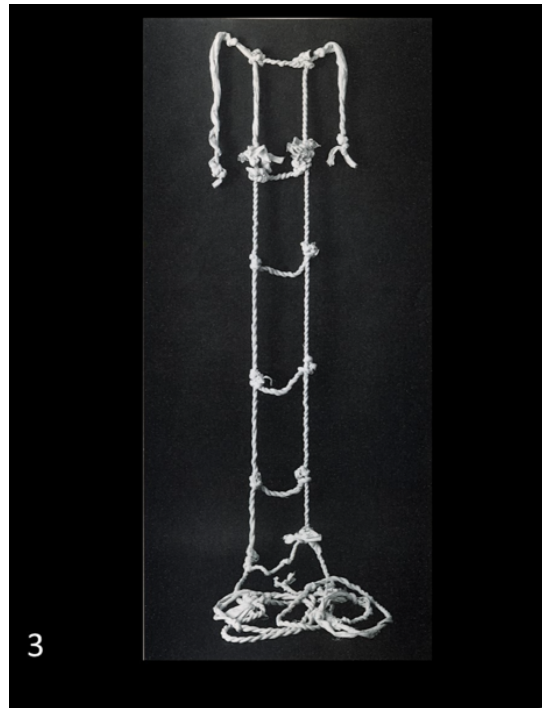


Image 5



Image 6

The bridge symbol serves as a connection point. (Image 6) It is a liminal space, existing in the in-between, where one place ends and another begins. The bridge holds this tension of opposites between the familiar and the unfamiliar. This makes the bridge a useful image in analysis as we move from a more familiar state into increasingly unfamiliar unconscious terrain. The wobbly rope bridge or the decaying old bridge are often used in movies about journeys. (Images 7 & 8) These shaky structures convey the immature or terrified early state of the psyche as it begins a terrifying venture into a new world.



Images 7 and 8



Image 9

Two paintings by Edward Munch address the bridge in different ways. (Image 9)
In one, three women stand together on a bridge looking over the side at the water

below. Connectedness is a common theme of the bridge, including its purpose as a meeting place for enemies as well as friends.



Image 10

In this case, it appears to be a friendly connection. (Image 10) Though many examples show a bridge as a place where enemies such as soldiers or warring armies meet.

(Image 11)

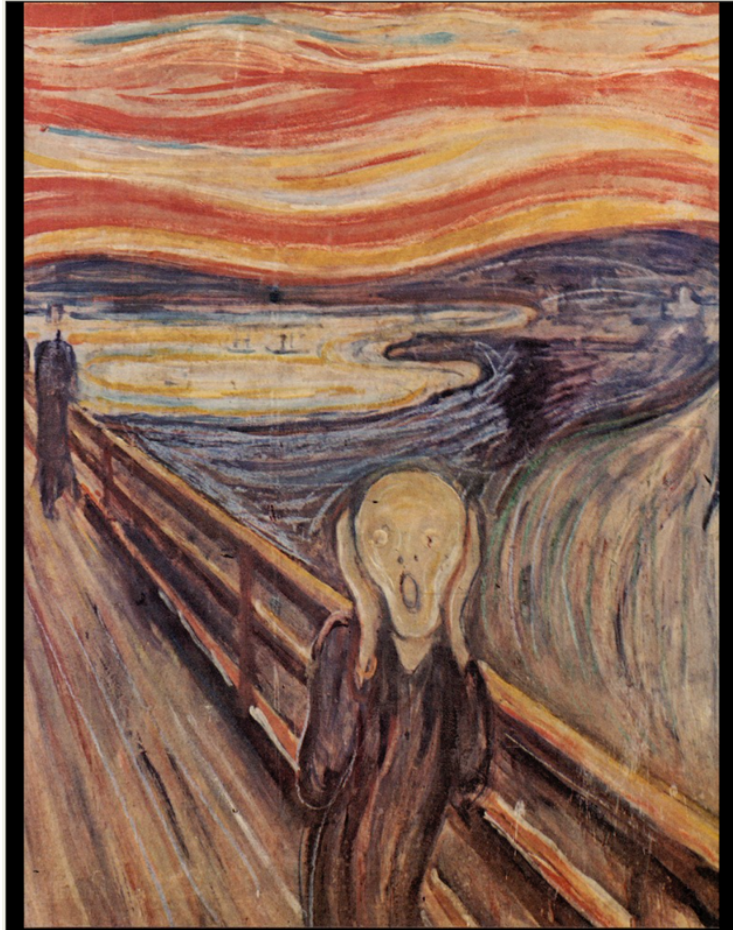


Image 11

Munch's more famous work, *The Scream*, depicts a man standing on a bridge in near-psychotic fear and despair. Munch writes of the original experience in his diary: "I was walking along with two friends. Then the sun set...and melancholy overcame me. My friends went on, I stood alone, trembling with fright. I felt as if a great scream was going through nature." When the painting was completed Munch wrote: "Only someone insane could paint this." In this way, the bridge serves as another symbol, connecting sanity and insanity over what can feel like a very narrow bridge. (Image 12)

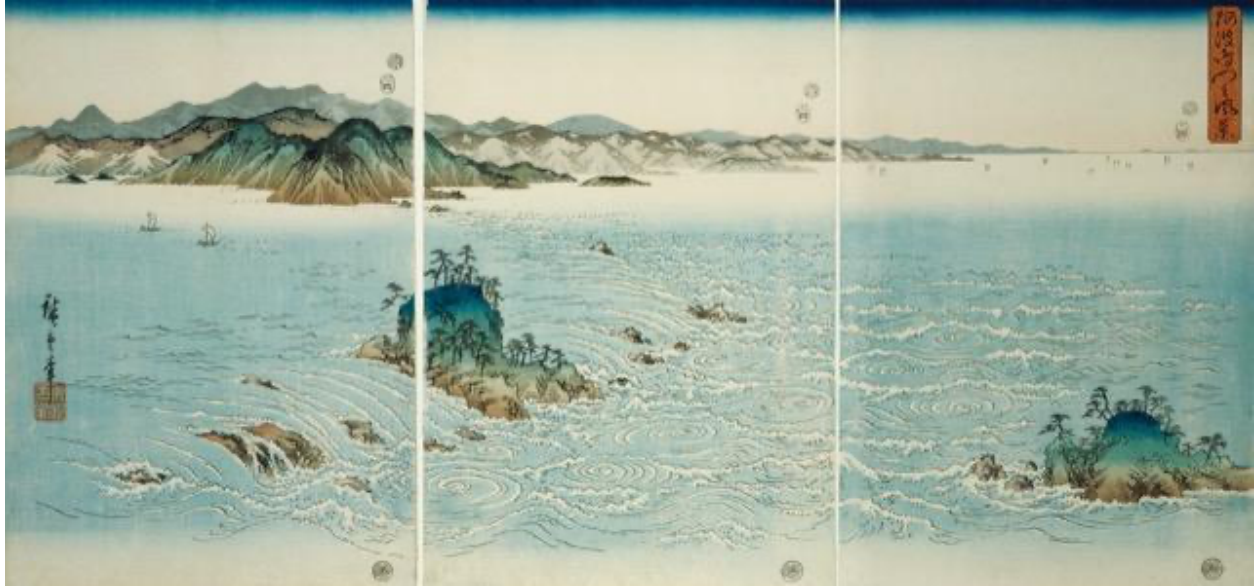


Image 12

Similarly, Edgar Allen Poe describes the ocean's whirlpools in "Descent into the Maelstrom" where he describes a figurative bridge in the state of calm at the center of the churning waters, a transition from dread to hope, discovering in the gulf a "narrow and tottering bridge which ... is the only pathway between Time and Eternity."

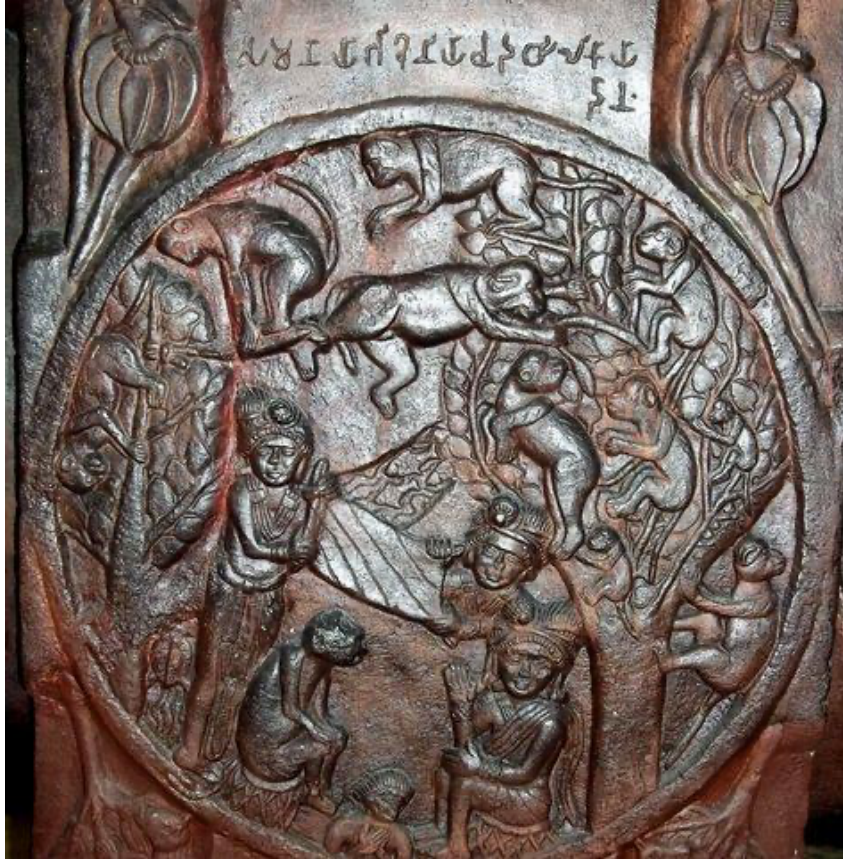


Image 13

In another image, the story of the Buddha's past life as a monkey king shows another kind of bridge. (Image 13) "Once the Bodhisattva was born as a monkey-king and lived in the Himalayas with an enormous retinue of monkeys. Near the bank of the Ganges grew a great banyan tree, with fruits of sublime fragrance and flavor which the monkeys gathered and ate. So that others should come to gather the fruit, the monkeys took great care that no fruit grew on or fell from the branch that stretched over the Ganges; but one fruit, concealed in an ant's nest, fell into the river and stuck in the net of a fisherman. When the fisherman showed the fruit to the Raja of Benares, he sent for the foresters from the area and requested from them the location of the tree that bore the delicious fruit. Hearing that it grew on the bank of the Ganges, the Raja started

toward it in rafts and, coming to the place where the banyan stood, ordered his archers to guard the tree. When they fell asleep, the monkey-king (Bodhisattva) came at midnight with his retinue to eat the delicious fruit. The Raja, waking up and seeing their doings, ordered his archers to surround them and shoot. The monkeys in the tree approached the monkey-king and, shivering with fear, asked him what they should do. "Do not fear," he said, comforting them, "I shall give you life." He then ascended a branch that stretched out over the Ganges and, springing from its end, alighted on a great bush on the other bank of the river. There he took a creeper and fastened one end of it to the bush and the other to his body. In measuring its length to cover the distance, he forgot to reckon the portion fastened to his body with the result that when he leapt back across the river, he could reach the tree only by seizing a branch of it with his hands. Stretched out in this manner, he made a bridge to safety for his followers. His body soon became covered with ulcerations and wounds from the hurried movements of the terrified monkeys. The Raja was filled with emotion when he beheld the monkey-king's act of sacrifice. Calling his men, he told them to bring him down by holding out a cloth to catch his body and by cutting the creeper along with the branch of the banyan tree by means of arrows. After they had carried out his orders, the Raja made the dying monkey king lie down on the soft bed and inquired as to what he was to the monkeys and what they were to him, that he did so much for them. The Bodhisattva answered his inquiries, preached the Law, and died."

The story of the monkey bridge strikes me very deeply in regard to my name's deeper meaning. I fulfilled my name's destiny in my family by being a link to help members of my family connect, to understand each other better. Several of my sisters

no longer speak to each other, and only keep up through me. The story of the monkey king reflected a part of my own journey as a bridge because I also learned what a toll this role can take on my physical body. The story holds a beautiful allegory about compassion and the need for a king to serve his subjects, but in reality, I refuse to sacrifice my physical health to be a monkey bridge for my family. This painful side continues to be difficult lesson for me to learn. That I need to also build bridges within myself, to connect to my own inner voice and create a link between my defenses and the genuine needs of my soul.