

Seeing and Not Seeing the Symbol: Greta Thunberg, the Indian Demon Devotee, and Jung's Virgin Sophia

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In his Introduction to Jung's *Black Books*, Sonu Shamdasani tells us that "symbols, [Jung] argued, stemmed from the unconscious, and the creation of symbols was the most important function of the unconscious. While the compensatory function of the unconscious was always present, the symbol-creating function was only present when we were willing to recognize it. ... The recognition and recovery of this symbol-creating power is portrayed in *Liber Novus*."¹ But what if it is not recognized? The psyche's capacity to make and respond to symbolic images—what Jung called the "transcendent function,"² which mediates between the conscious ego and the unconscious and culturally between "these times" and "the depths"—is challenged even more in our image-filled but depth-deprived era than it was a hundred years ago when Jung wrote and painted the *Red Book*.

Humans desire profundity as much as ever, but the post-Enlightenment mind has increasing trouble taking it seriously and tends to deny its reality or distort the images in which it appears. The Indian novelist Amitav Ghosh writes that "ours was a time when most forms of art and literature were drawn into the modes of concealment that prevented people from recognizing the realities of their plight."³ Refusal or inability to respond to the depths or symbolic dimension leads to a loss of reality. But the present

¹ C. G. Jung, *The Black Books*, Vol. 1, Introduction by Sonu Shamdasani (Norton, 2020), 72–73.

² Anne Casement, "Transcendent Function," in *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion*, eds. David K. Leeming, Anne Madden, and Stanton Marlan (Springer, 2020), 916–918.

³ Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement* (University of Chicago Press, 2017), 11.

crisis of culture and imagination may differ only in degree from what has long been true: access to deep reality—or to call it by its old name, the sacred—is hard and resistance to it is stiff. At times symbolic images succeed in cutting through our denial and, to a degree, opening our minds to a familiar Other that has been waiting—not always patiently—for us.



Figure 1. Greta Thunberg with the sign that says “SKOLSTREJK FOR KLIMATET” (SCHOOL STRIKE FOR CLIMATE) (Photograph: Michael Campanella/The Guardian)

This paper will circle around one such image, the person and symbol of the teenage Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg (Figure 1), in whom we believe the depths have to some degree broken through. It also explores the psychology of those who refuse her message—aiming to show that symbol deniers are also part of the mythical story they try to cancel. We will view Greta and her detractors alongside two related clusters of symbolic imagery: the “demon devotee” theme in ancient and contemporary Indian art and Carl Jung’s images of seeing and not seeing archetypal revelation in the *Red Book*.



Figure 2. Plate 155 in *The Red Book* by C. G. Jung. Pen and ink, gouache on parchment and regular paper, 1914–1930, Zurich, Switzerland. (Copyright: W.W. Norton & Co.)

We focus on Jung’s Plate 155 (Figure 2), a complex image that evolved from his drawing, during a 1920 North African trip, of a Berber woman. In his *Red Book* imagination it became an amalgam of Sophia, the Virgin, and a Daughter of God. After reviewing our previous work on the theme of “seeing” (darshan) in Indian religious art,⁴ we will focus on how humans often try *not* to see (or be seen by) the divine

⁴ Al Collins, “I have been seen’: Darshan in the *Sāmkhya Kārikā* and *Yoga Sūtra*,” <https://www.academia.edu/46765376>.

symbol, though they must inevitably open, or be opened, to its force.



Figure 3. Demon devotee in blissful surrender under Mahadevi/Durga. Stone sculpture, 961 CE, Ambika Mata Temple, Jagat, Rajasthan, India.

We pay special attention to the Indian “demon devotee” (Figure 3), a figure frequently encountered in the iconology of Shiva, Vishnu, and the Goddess.⁵ The basic structure of this mythologem is that a demon becomes strong enough to challenge the greatest

⁵ Alf Hiltebeitel, ed., *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees: Essays on the Guardians of Popular Hinduism* (State University of New York Press, 1989).

god but is violently overcome by her and in the end orients toward his conqueror in blissful surrender. Refusal or inability to see the divine is also a repeated theme in *The Red Book*.

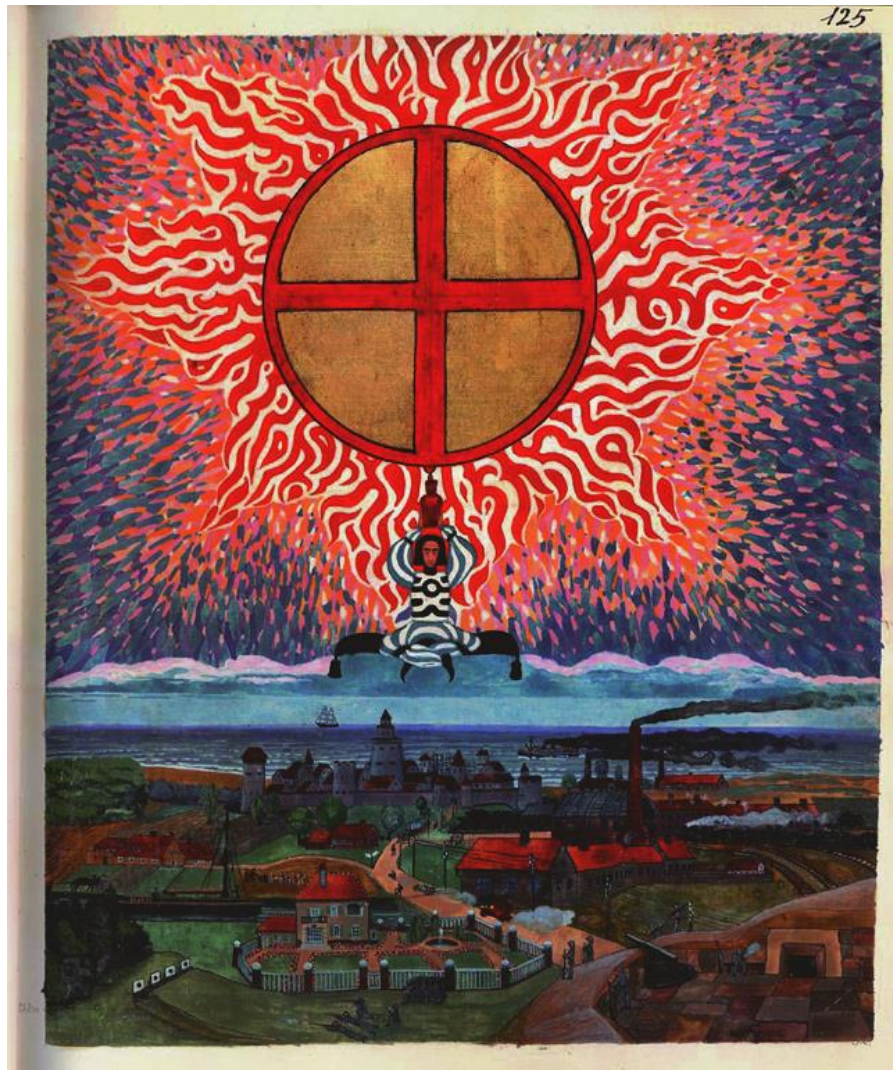


Figure 4. Plate 125 in *The Red Book*, by C. G. Jung. Pen and ink, gouache on parchment and regular paper, 1914–1930, Zurich, Switzerland. (Copyright: W.W. Norton & Co.)



Figure 5. Plate 169 in *The Red Book*, by C. G. Jung. Pen and ink, gouache on parchment and regular paper, 1914–1930, Zurich, Switzerland. (Copyright: W.W. Norton & Co.)

Ambivalence, ignorance, or outright alienation are particularly clear in *Red Book* Plates 125 (Figure 4), 155 (Figure 2), and 169 (Figure 5). Similarly, Greta Thunberg's symbolic activism has met with refusal or inability to respond to her mythical

presence. Why we do not or cannot see and, conversely, where we might find our vision, are key to the plight and salvation of the “Dead” in Jung’s *Seven Sermons* and to the existential crises of our time.

We will follow these three trails: Jung’s paintings of inability or refusal to respond to the symbol, the demon devotee, and Greta Thunberg as a partly successful breakthrough symbol. To open the question of seeing versus not seeing, we will explore the experience of *darshan* (Sanskrit “seeing”) as imagined in a few examples of Indian sacred art and especially in the demon devotee theme, which is also at the center of the Bengali writer Amitav Ghosh’s 2019 novel, *Gun Island*. Second, we look at *The Red Book* quest for soul and God symbols as well as Jung’s struggle to understand the refusal or inability to see them when they appear in the three paintings and the *Seven Sermons*. Third, we turn to the remarkable Greta Thunberg, not only an actual person but also an image of symbolic power that climate change deniers, who nevertheless recognize her force, have insistently demeaned and ridiculed—even after she was named *Time Magazine*’s Person of the Year for 2019. Our goal is to uncover the psychological and symbolic meaning of this young person and to amplify it with *Red Book* materials and the vision found in Indian art and literature.



Figure 6. Detail of Trimurti, the three faces of Shiva. Stone sculpture, second century BCE, The Elephanta Caves, Elephanta Island, Maharashtra, India.

Let us begin with an Indian image, one of the three faces of the Siva Trimurti (Figure 6) inside the cave temple of Elephanta, on an island near Bombay.⁶ Siva meditates with eyes closed, clearly in another realm and yet still here in our world, carved in the stone of the cave and visible to the worshipper or casual tourist. It is evident on entering the aura of the image that its vision was there before we came into the divine presence and that we enter a field of seeing that existed even prior to the image being chipped from the stone.

⁶ See https://live.staticflickr.com/7195/26967600925_1fd6b541d9_b.jpg, accessed August 23, 2022.

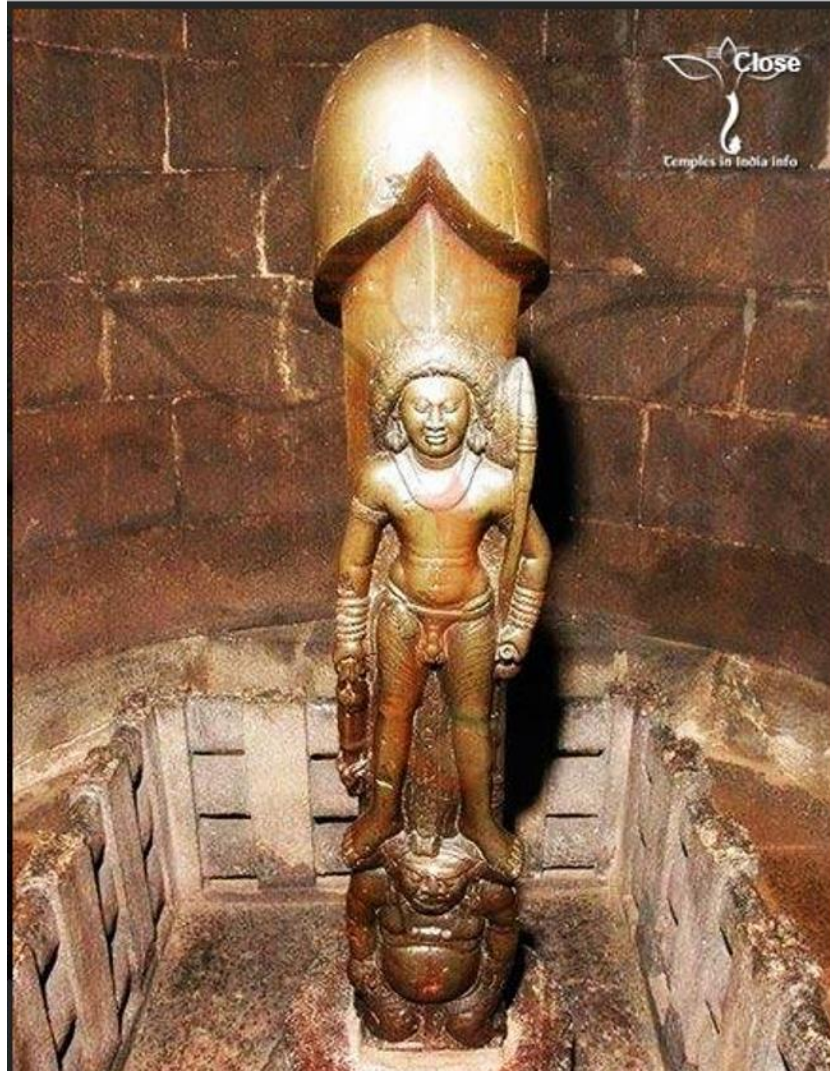


Figure 7. Gudimallam Lingam. Gudimallam Temple, Andhra Pradesh, India. Third century BCE–fourth century CE, stone, h: 5 ft. (From the website: Temples in India.)

This theme of being seen before we see, and the priority of the gaze of the divine symbol to our human gaze, is reiterated many times in Jung’s work, beginning with what he called his “original dispensation” dream at age three of a phallus on a golden throne. “A magnificent throne, a real king’s throne in a fairy tale. Something was standing on it ... It was a huge thing ... Made of skin and naked flesh and on top was something like a rounded head with no face and no hair. On the very top of the head was a single eye gazing motionlessly upward.”⁷ We suggest that this phallic being sees

⁷ C.G. Jung, *Memories Dreams Reflections* (Pantheon, 1963), 12.

virtually the approach of the dreaming child, in the same way that Siva's inward vision does not focus on the pilgrim in front of the image yet creates the psychic light that makes it possible for the visitor to see into the mind of the divinity behind the image in the stone. Jung puzzled throughout his life over the "ritual phallus" of the dream and in several places recognizes the truth that the unconscious sees him as much as, or more than, he sees it, the paradigmatic example perhaps being the 1944 heart attack dream of a yogi whom Jung realizes is dreaming him.⁸

We will use the Indian theme of darshan as a paradigm to clarify Jung's *Red Book* paintings and the symbolic life of Greta Thunberg.



Figure 8. Trimurti, the three faces of Shiva. Stone sculpture, second century BCE, The Elephanta Caves, Elephanta Island, Maharashtra, India.

⁸ Jung, 323.

The Elephanta image of Siva meditating (Figure 8) implies a viewer, a worshipper to contemplate the three-headed image of the god. Like that implicit devotee, we are drawn into the image and begin to see with the god's eye. The images of the divine in Indian sacred art are also similar to avatars, "descents" of the divine into our world. Like Krishna and Rama, they appear in our world to give us the vision of what is beyond our world. The image is alive; it precedes our vision of it and makes the latter possible, opening us to receive its meaning. As in the *Bhagavad Gita* when Krishna gives Arjuna a "divine eye" that is able to see his supernal nature, all sacred images—this is part of what makes them sacred—give us the potential to see, in some measure, the transcendent being that lies behind them and approaches us through them. The Shiva image implies this being that lies behind the images we can see: a fourth subtle presence that remains hidden in the stone yet, as it were, emits the other three.

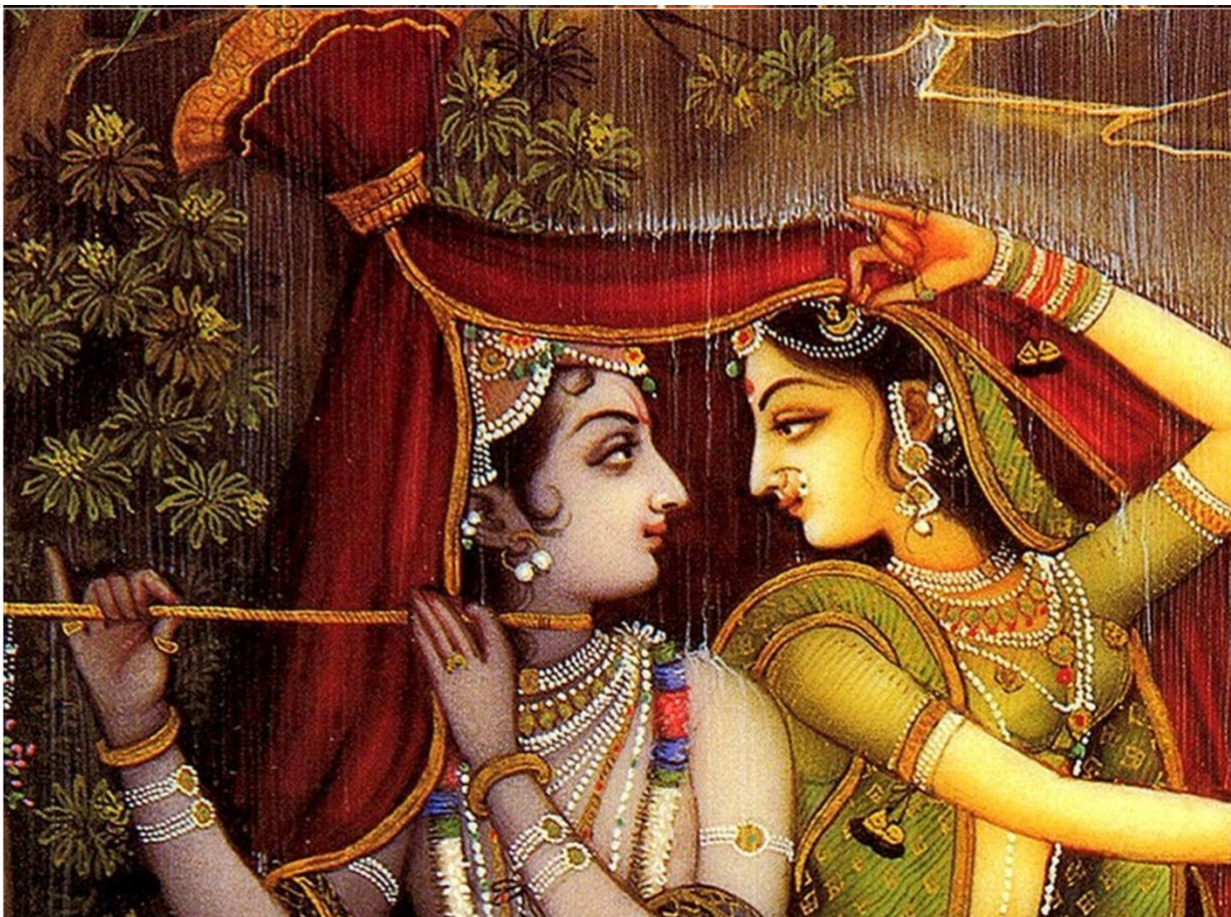


Figure 9. Krishna and Rhada by Shri B. G. Sharma (1924–2007). Miniature painting, India. (Source: <https://bgsharmaarts.com/>)

One of the most beloved images of darshan in Hindu art is the mutual vision of Krishna and Radha (Figure 9), the favorite among the “cowgirls” (*gopis*) with whom the young god sports in the springtime gardens of Vrindavan. Radha sees Krishna already seeing her, a gaze that gives her a divine eye able to see him—and also to see herself—through her reflection in his eye. The image of unconflicted darshan is not limited to lovers; it is also characteristic of the guru-disciple relationship.

I (Elaine Molchanov) first met my guru through such an experience when he gave me *Shaktipat* (descent of grace). This initiation awakens the kundalini energy and begins the transformation of the personality. When I went to India later that year, I met him face to face in darshan. Two of us were waiting in his personal room that day. An

elderly white-haired Indian disciple was called first. He bowed and placed flowers at Baba's feet. Baba then wrapped him in a shawl and brought him close and began speaking to him with love: "You have been with me a long time. Know that you are the Self." I witnessed waves of energy coming from Baba's body as golden light, each wave lifting me to a higher state of consciousness. Then it was my turn, and I could hardly get to my feet to approach Baba. Tears of joy were running down my face. Before I knew it, I was in his lap, and he was feeding me chocolates and pounding my back with his fists. He quoted Tukaram, a sixteenth-century saint in our lineage: "To receive shaktipat in a dream is very rare. You have received shaktipat in this way." And then came a moment between us when I looked straight into his eyes. I was surprised that I had no fear. I saw an ocean in his eyes and, in the next instant, saw the ocean within my own eyes. Then our separate oceans crashed together, becoming one. Baba said, "It is complete," and it was.

Yet darshan is not always smooth. God or the guru can refuse to communicate, or—more commonly—the human who needs to encounter God can refuse to see, or even try to appropriate, the God's power as his own. The Indian theme that most clearly reflects the refusal or inability to see is the "demon devotee," an ego-possessed opponent of the god who attempts to usurp the god's power and take possession of her realm.⁹ Inevitably the demon is defeated by the god, typically through a trick that penetrates the demon's seemingly invincible defenses. (For instance, a demon who cannot be killed by air or water, and neither by day nor by night, is attacked at twilight with a weapon made of foam.) But the demon's defeat is also frequently his salvation, as it proves a way to transcend his frozen claim that the whole world is about him.

⁹ Hildebeitel, *Criminal Gods*.



Figure 10. Siva Nataraja. Bronze statue, eleventh century, Tamil Nadu, India. (Musée Guimet, Paris, France.)

In an image that is widely repeated in Indian art, a demon named “Forgetfulness” (Apasmara) falls under the foot of dancing Siva and is crushed (Figure 10).¹⁰ But a look at Apasmara’s face gives a deeper reading of his state: as is often the case, the demon’s expression is one of bliss. Enraptured by the music, dance, and spell of the flickering fire he falls into a samadhi of adoration of his former enemy.¹¹

¹⁰ Wikipedia Foundation, “Apasmara,” accessed August 3, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apasmara#/media/File:Shiva_Nataraja_Mus%C3%A9e_Guimet_25971.jpg.

¹¹ Art Institute of Chicago, Shiva as Lord of the Dance (Nataraja), accessed August 3, 2022, <https://www.artic.edu/artworks/24548/shiva-as-lord-of-the-dance-nataraja>.



Figure 11. Manasa, the Goddess of snakes. Stone (basalt) sculpture, ca. 11th century, Bangladesh. (Art Institute of Chicago, 2019.726.)

Amitav Ghosh's recent novel, *Gun Island*,¹² repeats the demon devotee theme, imagining the demon as a modern profit-seeking Merchant. In the Indian folktale that

¹² Amitav Ghosh, *Gun Island* (Macmillan, 2019).

inspired the novel, *Manasa, the Goddess of Snakes* (Figure 11), seeks to make a Bengali trader become her devotee. Ghosh pictures the trader as an agent of Western (specifically Venetian) colonialism who aims to subdue the natural world of Bengal and turn it into profit for himself. Manasa, demanding instead that he honor her, is relentless, but the Merchant still resists. It is a life-or-death struggle, and he has himself locked into an iron storage box to protect against the Goddess's advances. Just as he thinks himself safe, she finds a way in: through an unnoticed crack in the iron, a venomous spider enters and bites him almost fatally. His effort not to see the Goddess's claim, and also not to *be* seen in his refusal, is thwarted.

To switch to our contemporary world, rich imperialists and capitalists—who are among the primary causes of climate change—seek not to see (or be seen or affected by) the world they have made. Their iron box will be the last islands or mountain tops imagined to be invulnerable to the heating of the air and rise of sea levels. We predict that the Goddess will find them even there.

We see Jung's Virgin-Sophia anima image as isomorphic with Manasa and also with Greta . All three seek—but do not always find—devotees. Manasa and Greta seek to compel recognition of the effects of our self-centeredness—the heating of the planet and disruption of its systems—and to convert us to a new vision of our world based on ecological values. Jung's anima image (Plate 155, Figure 2) shows a symbolic transformation of the Christian church, and our Christian culture, through an emergence of the goddess who is mostly ignored or rejected by the congregation and society to whom she is revealed. A feminine presence, who expresses the Hebrew Bible Sophia (“Wisdom”) and also the New Testament Virgin, erupts in the place of the altar, the locus where divine and human connect, opening the walls of the church and revealing the crescent moon and a shower of gold that halos the goddess's head. Below

her are a number of figures, including at least one ecclesiastic, who seem to have little or no appreciation of her significance, although the light on some of their faces emanates from her or the gold halo above her head.

The image of the Virgin Sophia is deeply complex but uses an ordinary woman as its carrier, something like a day residue in a dream. We suggest the same in the case of Greta Thunberg. An ordinary person bears the weight of the archetype, like Joan of Arc or the peasant boy through whom the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared. We view Greta's story and media presence mythically and seek parallels for the suggestive events and circumstances that surround her. Greta is singled out for a special status like many shamans and religious figures by the "creative illness"¹³ or initiatory sickness through which she had to pass on her way to her individual gnosis. Like many shamans gifted with a "different" brain (Greta is on the autism spectrum), she also endured elective mutism, self-starvation, and depression before arriving at her life work of showing the world an unflinching view of the reality of environmental devastation. Anorexia permanently restricted her growth and she looks much younger than her age, making her a better vessel for the child archetype.¹⁴

¹³ Henri Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious* (Basic Books, 1970).

¹⁴ In its cover story, *Time Magazine* (December 23/30, 2019) identifies Greta's moment as the "time of the child."



Figure 12. *Mysterious Boat (Barque Mystique)*. Odilon Redon. Oil on panel, ca. 1897. Private collection. (Image source: <https://www.wikiart.org/en/odilon-redon/mysterious-boat>)

Among Greta's symbolic acts, crossing the great water (the Atlantic Ocean) via sailboat (Figure 12) on her way to speak at the United Nations stands out.



Figure 13. Swedish environmental activist Greta Thunberg watches as US President Donald Trump enters the United Nations to speak with reporters in a still image from video taken in New York City, US, September 23, 2019. (REUTERS/Andrew Hofstetter.)

The UN appearance itself was equally symbolic, not least because of the “chance” half encounter with Donald Trump in the hall before, where the camera shows Greta fixing Trump with a recognitive look as The Donald, out of focus and blurred, seems to turn away to avoid her eye (Figure 13). In her strength and capacity to stand up to adults and prick their pretensions and imperfections, Greta resembles her fellow Swede Pippi Longstocking, the eponymous heroine of popular children’s books.



Figure 14. Pippi Longstocking. Film still. 1969 TV series *Pipi Longstocking* (Sveriges TV).

Greta is an oppositional child whose symbolic qualities can catch adult attention better than the dry scientific facts she reports. Greta directs our gaze to a potential reality most of us cannot bear to see: the sun setting on human civilization and the profound injury it has done to our planet. What Greta recognizes is very like Carl Jung's pre-war visions of a rising tide of blood and Europe inundated with the flotsam of human devastation.¹⁵ It was both personal and world-historic, and the history is itself also symbolic. As Jung was told, Greta knows that it "will come to pass" and cannot be doubted. Jung's visions were part of the reason he began the imaginal journey that became *The Red Book*, and he kept them at the forefront of his mind. Greta looks one-pointedly, and she sees.

It is essential to the symbolic function that it refers at once to the outer world (the physical universe, human society, politics, and history) and to the inner psychic world. It was the fact of that connection that allowed Jung to recognize himself at the advent of the Great War as a real, and sane, person—not the madman he feared he was becoming and comically reimagined in the asylum section of *The Red Book*. The

¹⁵ Greta had a dream that paralleled Jung's vision: she saw the ocean covered in floating plastic.

symbol is precognitive; it shows us “the way of what is to come” and orients us in respect to that. The inner transformation that the symbol makes possible is ineluctably tied to the events in the outer world in which we must live. This connection may be the essence of synchronicity and the alchemical *unus mundus*.

Let us look at the precognitive function of the symbol in Jung, Greta, and the Indian material. Jung and Greta each foresaw an actual event in the recent world (the Great War and planetary devastation). Similarly, it is one of the narrative tasks of Ghosh’s novel to find recent events that correspond to the psychospiritual struggle between the snake goddess Manasa and the Merchant she pursues. Ghosh finds it in seventeenth-century colonialism, specifically the beginning of the exploitation and destruction of the Gangetic delta mangrove jungle, called the Sundarbans or “Beautiful Forest.” Ghosh imagines the goddess of the Sundarbans—and all wild places and creatures—losing her power on the human world (in snakebite, a tornado, and a synchronicity of animal migrations) to bring us back to a recognition of our proper place in the spiritual and biological ecosystem of planet Earth (Figure 15).



Figure 15. Earth over the lunar horizon, Lunar reconnaissance orbiter, October 2015. Mosaic composite photograph, digital C print. (Copyright: Michael Benson.)

Ghosh would recognize the virus as a multiform of Manasa's insidious spider, slipping through the walls of our quarantine to pierce us with the spike proteins on its surface.

The Virgin-Sophia image in Plate 155 (Figure 2) possesses multiple symbolic references. She is the Hebrew Bible's Wisdom (Sophia) and the New Testament Virgin, mother of Christ. She appears in the place of the altar and, Jung says, is the new altar or place of interchange between humans and God. In this way she is imagined as the quintessential symbol. Her appearance opens the outer walls of the church, allowing

the crescent moon to shine through into the sanctum. A shower of gold pours through the apparently absent roof to halo the figure of this complex goddess. These momentous events go unnoticed or are actively rejected by the crowd of people milling about below, their faces lit by the effulgent figure above but their inner eyes unable to open to her meaning.

This theme of the goddess appearing through the now-absent walls of a church was repeated in another dream of Elaine Molchanov's.

I was sent on a search-and-rescue mission as part of a group of fellow practitioners of yoga. We were in a devastated city that reminded me of Dresden after the WWII firebombing. Most buildings were flattened. Walking the streets amid the rubble I saw, on the left, a cathedral that had been mostly blown apart by bombing; however, part of the back wall was still standing. Through the wall I saw a statue, larger than life, of a goddess. I also could make out that there had been another wall constructed in front of the goddess. That wall was now gone so that she could be seen from inside the cathedral by worshippers from whom formerly she would have been hidden. The goddess was free now. She had always been there but was walled off by the builders of the church; now she could be seen.

Two other paintings from *The Red Book* show this theme of the not seeing, or hiddenness, of the archetypal world. In Plate 125 (Figure 4), a wartime city, mostly industrial but with vestiges of earlier medieval life, goes about its business with no awareness of the blazing fiery cross in the sky above, or the divine child figure between it and the oblivious urban world below. The last picture in *The Red Book*, Plate 169 (Figure 5), is even more enigmatic. What Jay Sherry has called an “nuclear rainbow explosion” at the lower-left corner radiates light in fractionated colors into a field of

unfinished caricatured heads.¹⁶ Those farther away from the explosive mandala include skulls and skeletons with a “primitive” appearance, painted in a livid green. Kiley Laughlin has done extensive research into this image,¹⁷ finding in it Jung’s continuing commitment to his forebears, but primarily the dead aspects of our civilization and culture. Prominent among the latter is Christianity, which, as Murray Stein showed in 1985, Jung worked to “treat” and redeem in his alchemical writings, *Answer to Job*, and so on. This “treatment” is exactly what we believe is happening in Plate 155 (Figure 2), where the Virgin-Wisdom anima manifests in the place of, or (Jung says) *as* the altar, thus transforming Christianity and putting it on a better track by restoring the feminine to its proper place. She, like Manasa, seeks to have us as her devotees but we, represented in the figures of the humans milling about below the divine image, will have little to do with it. Like the Merchant in the Indian story, the figures turn away or simply cannot see the miracle appearing before them and illuminating them outside their awareness.

In the article on “Image” in their dictionary of Jungian analysis, Plaut, Samuels, and Shorter note that “the [symbolic] image is endowed with a generative power; its function is to arouse; it is psychically compelling.”¹⁸ But the power of the image cannot be effective unless the person to whom it appears opens to it, relates to it, and engages in a dialogue with it. Jung says that “[if] this crucial operation of entering in with your own reaction is not carried out, all the changes are left to the flow of images, and you yourself remain unchanged” (CW 14, para. 753). Isolation from the symbol is what we

¹⁶ *A Pictorial Guide to the Red Book* by Jay Sherry, ARAS Connections, 2010.
https://d3sr848ztgqeg6.cloudfront.net/production/public/docs/00033Sherry.pdf?VersionId=4Zhre17vZwjIRU.M3p4OnFqcE_F7xJAv

¹⁷ Kiley Laughlin, “Treasure Hunting: A Hermeneutical Inquiry into the Final Painting of Liber Novus” (PhD diss, Pacifica Graduate Institute, 2017).

¹⁸ Fred Plaut, Andrew Samuels, and Bani Shorter, *A Critical Dictionary of Jungian Analysis* (Routledge, 1986), 73.

find in the three *Red Book* plates. There is little relationship to the divine image, and so the persons to whom the image directs itself remain untransformed, like the Dead whom Jung—often as angrily as Greta or Manasa Devi—attempts to “treat,” that is, to show the reality of their relationship to the divine. These images reveal both the power of the connection with the numinous depths that Jung recognized and tried to show others, and his sadness, even despair, over the resistance to seeing it that he encountered in our “dead” civilization. In the *Seven Sermons* Jung took on the role of cultural teacher or prophet, which was to be his personal myth for the rest of his life. He gradually realized this role was itself a symbol to which he must be open and relate, perform, but not claim as his own property.



Figure 16. Plate 154 in *The Red Book*, by C. G. Jung. Pen and ink, gouache on parchment and regular paper, 1914–1930, Zurich, Switzerland. (Copyright: W.W. Norton & Co.)

He called it Philemon (among other names) and, especially in the dialogues with Philemon between sermons in *The Red Book* version of the text, he worked on his relationship to this guru figure. It is significant that he placed his painting of Philemon (Plate 154, Figure 16) next to his other teacher, the anima represented by the Virgin-Sophia image on the facing page (Plate 155, Figure 2), like Elijah and Salome earlier (folio 5). As implied in the demon devotee theme in Indian sacred art and Amitav Ghosh's novel, "only a god can save us" (Heidegger's words in 1966¹⁹). The numinous, symbolic quality of Greta Thunberg's image touches the same archetypal depths, as even her detractors seem to have realized.

The anger in the personal and symbolic Greta, and the rage against both, can be viewed as epitomizing the two sides of a conflict that has emerged as the defining struggle of our age. To understand our time, we must recognize the symbolic character of the climate crisis and the coronavirus—their announcement of the world's response to our misuse of it—but also realize that humans' resistance to acknowledging these things is part of the myth. The demon devotee, the populist response to Greta Thunberg, and Jung's images, show what is going on in the refusal to see the symbol that demands our attention. In each of images a number of persons are pictured beside a powerfully numinous figure: an image of the anima as portal to, or part of the God-image (Plate 155, Figure 2), an explosively radiant mandala (Plate 159, Figure 17), and a flaming cross (Plate 125, Figure 4).

¹⁹ Martin Heidegger, in an interview with Rudolf Augstein and Georg Wolff, *Der Spiegel*, September 23, 1966.

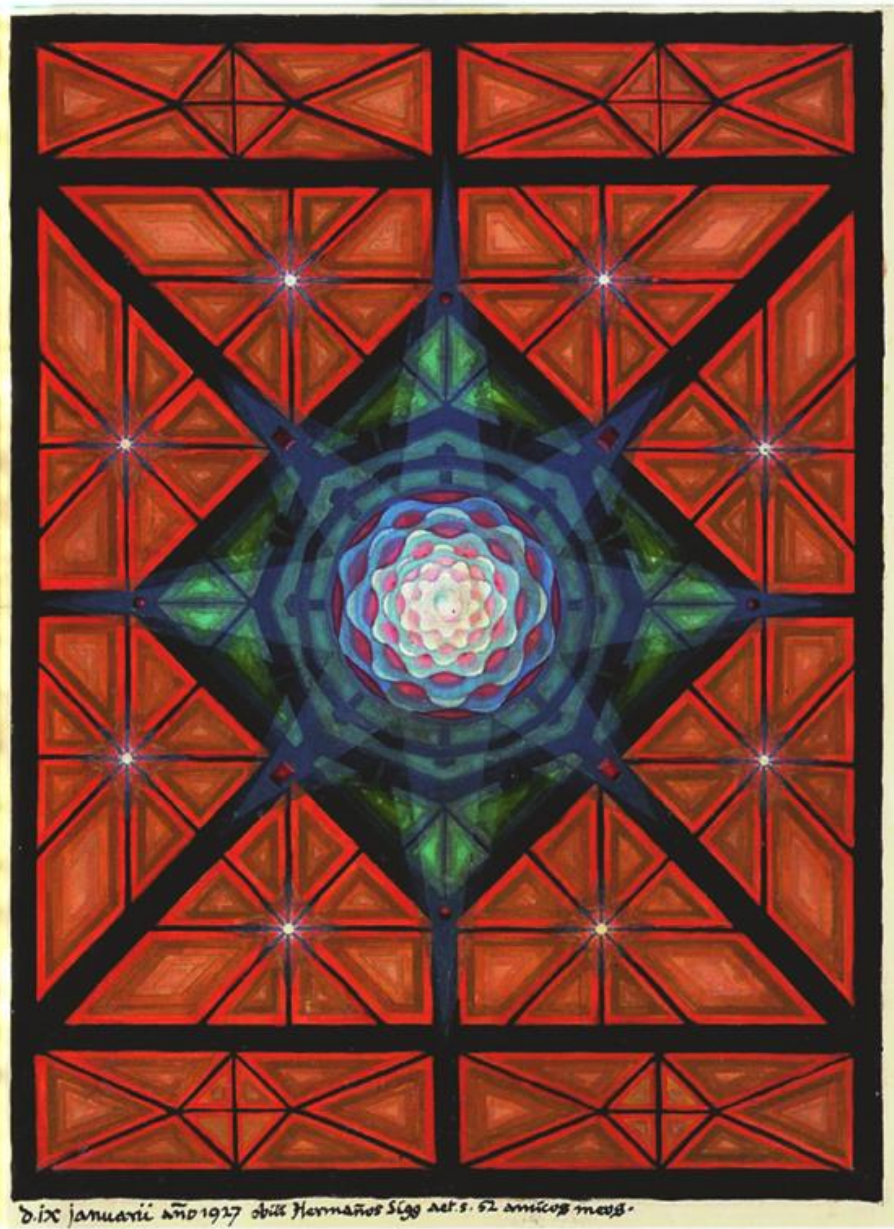


Figure 17. Plate 159 in *The Red Book* by C. G. Jung. Pen and ink, gouache on parchment and regular paper, 1914-1930, Zurich, Switzerland. (Copyright: W.W. Norton & Co.)

It is not exactly that the human figures do not see the Self-image to which they are placed in juxtaposition, but rather that, for the most part, they show no openness to it, no personal engagement. They go about their business or actively resist.



Figure 18. Carnelian intaglio: Lion-headed serpent, Roman, Imperial, ca. second–third century CE.

In amplifying the psychology underlying climate deniers, we might think of the gnostic Demiurge. The denier, who is usually an extreme individualist, is a man (gendered like the Demiurge) of surpassing ignorance and little ultimate strength. He puffs himself up, despite and because of weakness, as all-powerful; like Donald Trump, he thinks he can “do whatever [he] want[s].” Demiurge psychology, on this reading, creates a secondary world, that of neoliberal, human- (self-) centered enterprise, which has no place for the actual environing world in which he lives except as usable material for his enjoyment. His power exists only within this egocentric space. Like Heinz Kohut’s description of a “narcissistic personality,”²⁰ he is split between a half that flouts and tries to impose his power, and another half that feels what he tries to suppress—the

²⁰ Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self* (International Universities Press, 1977).

terror threatening from the darkness outside his streetlamp arc of superficial knowledge and control. Messages from that black surround are repelled by the narcissistic pretender caught in the light of denial—like Ghosh’s spider, they would poison all the assumptions inside: the fantasy of endless growth, power over the Earth and eventually the galaxy, the conquest of death, and a life of endless desires fulfilled by a world wholly under his control. This image is essentially the “derangement” Amitav Ghosh writes of; it is the Merchant and the capitalist nation-state under whose aegis he sails, spreading civilization, CO₂, and now the coronavirus, over the planet.

The British psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott independently expressed some of Jung’s thoughts in different language. In his essay “Dreaming, Fantasying, and Living,”²¹ he uses the trope of a distinction between “dreaming” and “daydreaming” to show something like the difference between Jung’s “symbol” and “sign.” A real dream involves penetrating the rigid form of an ego-determined mind and opening to the unconscious waters underneath. A daydream, on the contrary, is just the repetition—like a nightly traumatic flashback, but through rose-colored glasses—of imaginary satisfactions of the pretense, hardened through a lifetime of self-delusion, to control the world, bend it to our shallow wishes, and prop up the “vertical split”²² that keeps us away from the darkness—and light—of real dreaming. The “spirit of these times,” we suggest, consists largely of daydreams.

It is evident that in the end demons must be forced to accept the message of the symbol and experience the dissolution of their imagined autonomy and conquest. They need to become devotees. Jung’s encounters with the Dead show a similar kind of evolution although the Dead are simply incomplete and not demonic. A crowd of dead

²¹ Donald W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (Routledge Classics, 2005), 35-50.

²² Heinz Kohut, *The Restoration of the Self* (International Universities Press, 1978).

Anabaptists sought his help in answering their questions about their faith. A pilgrimage to Jerusalem left them unsatisfied, and they approached Jung again for spiritual help, almost knocking off the kitchen door of his house in their urgency for an answer. In *The Red Book* version of the *Sermons to these Dead*, the response comes from his daemon Philemon. The Dead are finally able to die in peace and rise up “like smoke above the shepherd’s fire” into their individual stars. The situation in *The Red Book* paintings is not as complete. In Plate 125 (Figure 4) a blazing cross evokes no response in the war preparations going on below. In the last painting, Plate 169 (Figure 5), the faces are unfinished and, at best, partially open to the blazing mandala in the bottom-left corner. In the anima image (Plate 155, Figure 2) the not-seers seem to have many ways of turning away from, or against, the goddess who is destined to become their new altar. Nevertheless, as in Elaine’s dream, there is no real arguing against what has happened in this image. The walls of the church are gone and the crescent moon shines in, signaling the arrival of the goddess whose halo of gold flakes seems, like Zeus in the story of Danae, to descend from an opening in the roof. So how can they not see? How can the boring fantasy of ego control hide the blazing revelation of the divine in her world-destroying and world-transforming theophany?

The force of this question is at the heart of Greta Thunberg’s symbolic power. She looks us all—and especially those with power and money—in the eye and puts the question starkly: “How could you not know?” She is not announcing facts. She is demanding that we recognize the truth of our denial and stop it. The symbol is not just an indication or sign of something that remains hidden but is an actual early manifestation of what it symbolizes. Jung’s visions did not just *show* the approach of the war; they *were part of* what we might call (with *Star Wars*) a “disturbance in the force” that was a prodromal manifestation of what developed into the Great War. The

same for Greta: her vision of a heating/flooding disaster is her body and mind's sense of being directly moved and affected by the calamity. Her earlier autism, mutism, depression, and self-starvation can be seen as effects on her mind and body of the upwelling heat crisis on the planet. At least it would not be odd if her psyche interpreted them so. Like Manasa and the Virgin Sophia, and the goddess in Elaine's dream, Greta (we may call her "Greta," like *The Red Book* "Jung") slips through an opening in our wall and looks at us with the eye of one we would rather not see. Recognition of the reality of the killing heat and flood that is already coming upon us, and the revelation of the goddess that it announces, is only possible through the symbol. And the symbol can only be seen in an "alternate" state of consciousness, dreaming rather than daydreaming, by an "Other" like Greta who also embodies it.

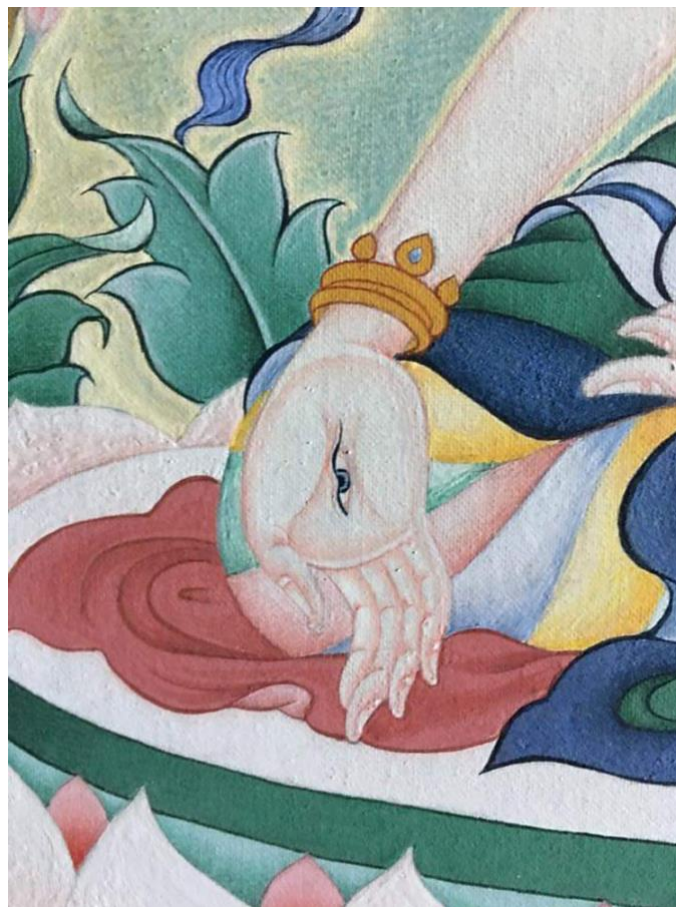


Figure 18. *Divine eye in the palm of Tara*. Painting (detail). (©Elsa Massi, emthangkaart.com)

We have argued that being open to the meaning and force of a symbolic image depends on realizing that we are first seen by the image and being given a “divine eye” that allows us to see it in return (Figure 18). For this mutual darshan to take place we must be open to the approach of the numinous, not turn away or try to take control of it in the name of our individual interests. In politics and medicine, however, it is hard to see beyond those interests. Because an innate selfishness or ego will not let go the will to power and acquisition, we are left with an intrinsic ambivalence that we cannot overcome on our own. Hence the need for the god—in *The Red Book*, Philemon and the Virgin Sophia—to “crossover” (avatar) and cut through our metalized barrier.

The Red Book records the piercing approach of the symbolic and the daydreaming ego’s reluctant response to its advent. “Jung” and his figures do not always seek the rebirth of the soul; sometimes they quarrel with its symbols, bicker with and insult it in a futile effort to dominate or deny the unconscious content. *The Red Book* moves back and forth between dream and daydream and never finally resolves the conflict (perhaps coming closest in the *Seven Sermons*). This, we suggest, is why Jung abandoned it and took a new tack through architecture and alchemy. But he did make progress along his personal road of individuation and his way guides us in coming to terms with the present moment. The Indian tradition teaches us that demons are profoundly stupid because they have no sense of what life is really about, so that the future remains utterly blank for them. Here is the fundamental crack in their steel-plated armor. The symbol, like Manasa’s spider, sees deeper than the wall the ego erects around itself. It has the power to force a response, at some point, from the reluctant or clueless devotee.

To see the symbol, then, is not knowing *of* something, as John Freeman suggested in asking Jung in old age whether he believed in God. It is a partial *identity with* the

divine or archetypal content, a knowing by being or becoming what one is.²³ When Jung (like Philemon fifty years earlier) said that he didn't *believe* in God but *knew* and was teaching what he knew, he affirmed that he lived with and in (the) God (image). Conversely, those who do not see the symbol, cannot feel it in themselves and themselves in it, close themselves off from the divine and live in a psychological hell.

Originating in China rather than Manasa's India, the suppressed violence in an abused world has erupted in an epidemic more immediately devastating than the gentle rise of the seas and the quiet deaths of thousands of unnoticed species. Within a month's time a biological volcano exploded in our face, demanding notice and offering the possibility of awareness that the climate and ecological catastrophe we knew was coming—in a short but still indefinite period of years—was here already. A symbol of sharp clarity swept over the world. Sadly, it was denied by the American president, who exploited the cultural nostalgia for an imagined former spirit of the depths, using the image of an America "[made] great again" to ignore the demand posed by the virus to steer human life away from aggrandizement of self.

The pandemic, our contemporary Great Death, is intimately related to the advent of political reaction and fascist figures like Donald Trump. We see both the coronavirus and Trumpian nationalism-populism-individualism as psychological and historic realities that demand symbolic reading. The modern, cosmopolitan West (and its variants elsewhere) prefers to devalue or ignore symbols and the spiritual depths they manifest. However, the depths find ways around the rejection. The last American presidential election shows the opposition between Western civilization—the urban, educated, self-certain world of the "elites" who claim to represent reality and fact—and

²³ The former would be a mere sign, pointing at something outside itself, not a symbol that is one with its content.

the small town, relatively uneducated minority who hold to an imagined but partly real “spirit of the depths,” however shamefully identified with “making America great again” and restoring a racist, immigrant-free, utopia of antebellum rural life. We suggest that this red-capped Other may be more directly in touch with the symbolic dimension than are we hyper-conscious putative controllers of our own (and their) future. On this reading, Donald Trump would be the unconscious bearer of the depths, and his “rallies” (like Hitler’s in the 1930s) are the symbolic festivals where suppressed energies explode through the enlightened rationalism of these times and challenge its cultural hegemony. Nazi “Wagnerism”²⁴ was one way in which a “volkisch” past was conjured up as a way to challenge the cosmopolitan present and overturn its “inferior,” “Jewish” (for Trumpers, “immigrant”) mass existence. The historical and cultural stupidity of this presumption ironically suggests just how powerful the psychological force of its symbolism may be. Similarly, in present-day Europe and America the thinking classes profess incomprehension at how working-class citizens could be ensnared by a movement whose economic and power aims are contrary to their actual interests. To return to a previous trope, the streetlamp of rationality lights only a patch of psychological ground. We cannot see into the shadows where a deeper psyche works to show us more.

Conspiracy theories are best seen from the perspective of depth psychology. “Big tech” (like the “deep state”) is an image of godless “powers and principalities” that aim to keep down a “great” America that taps into and expresses a divine source energy. In this gnostic fantasy, the technological state stands in for the Demiurge. On the narcissistic side of the vertically split populist ego, the Demiurge puts on the

²⁴ Alex Ross, *Wagnerism: Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 2020).

Halloween suit of a daydream nineteenth-century America. Leading the parade down Main Street are clown figures like Donald Trump. Like other demons, he may attain his destiny in spite of himself. Infection with COVID-19 did not make him see, nor did defeat in the presidential election—nor even the gimlet eye of Greta Thunberg. His refusal continues, and we may imagine him as another of the green unfinished faces on Jung's *Red Book* Plate 169. Unwarmed by the furnace blazing in the lower-left corner, he may become one of the deadest of the Dead, his lament echoing within his unfinished skull. More optimistic than the Christian Hell, we can picture him at the last moment or just beyond it, the stuff of poetry and psychotherapy despite his contempt for both, seeing at last his role in personifying the refusal of our culture to admit the Goddess of Snakes into the collective psyche. Like the symbol of forgetfulness, Apasmara, Trump—and we with him—may in the end look up at her smiling face and gratefully receive the blow she has prepared for him and us.