

THE POSTCARDS: A TRYPTICH

The Minoan Snake Goddess is flanked by a Chardin still-life, somber and tranquil, and by Mahomedan angels brilliantly clothed and with multicolored wings, who throng round a fleshcolored horse with a man's face on whose back rides a whiteturbaned being without a face, merely a white, oval disk, and whose hands too are unformed, or hidden in blue sleeves.

Are the angels bringing attributes to this unconscious one?

Is he about to be made human?

One bends to the floor of heaven in prayer;
one brings a bowl (of water?), another a tray (of food?); two
point the way, one watches from on high, two and two more
indicate measure, that is, they present
limits that confine the way to a single path;
two debate the outcome, the last
prays not bowed down but looking
level towards the pilgrim.
Stars and the winding
ceintures of the angels surround
the gold cloud or flame before which he rides; heaven itself
is a dark, somber blue.

Meanwhile the still-life offers, makes possible,
a glass of water, a wine-bottle made of glass so dark it is
almost black yet not opaque, half-full of
perhaps water, and beside these, two courgettes
with rough, yellow-green, almost reptilian skins, and a shallow basket
of plums, each almost cleft
with ripeness, the bloom
blue upon them, their skin
darker purple or almost crimson where a hand
touched them, placing them here. Surely
this table, these fruits, these vessels, this water
stand in a cool room, stonefloored, quiet.
And the Goddess? She stands
between these worlds. She is ivory,
her breasts bare, her bare arms
braceleted with gold snakes. Their heads
uprear towards her in homage.
Gold borders the tiers of her skirt, a gold hoop
is locked round her waist. She is a few inches high.
And she muses, her lips are pursed,
beneath her crown that must once have been studded with gold
she frowns, she gazes
at and beyond her snakes as if
not goddess but priestess, waiting
an augury.

Without thought I have placed these images
over my desk. Under these signs
I am living.