

Plants & Animals

John Thorpe

Considering that we just spent a bodacious number of millennia instructing plants & animals, it's wierd that there's a switching over of that to human children.

Tho perhaps not so strange. I just saw Chinese art in the Brundage collection, in which 8 peaches are particularly auspicious. There was also some early "Cycladic" (Melos, Naxos, Amorgos, Paros, Thera etc.) sculpture wch suggests that for 1,000 years (3200-2200 BC) those people were content to perpetuate 2 basic figures: (1) the female nude & (2) the male musician (a pretty bogus museum-piece isolation of the life - but, still, what does it mean that these temple or honky-tonk figures are *still* juxtaposed on our TV? - strength in symbiosis or whatever, since they lasted a millennium in the Cyclades). The mysterious "will be" still, "will stay" of it. "Stereo." Not "naturalistic," but both at once, like the *folded arms* of this sculptural tradition. The arms *resting* between chest & stomach for 1,000 years while, obviously, labor *required* those arms. But the arms only extend *out* from the body in the musicians.

Oh well - I don't know a lot about ancient experiences, but feel it's made a language which for better or worse turns around to meet it, & maybe bites it, like carnival outlasting metropolis.

For the moment, I don't know what to say about that 'regional' shot in *Peninsula*. Where I was coming from was a little notebook entry (inspired, I guess, by Matsuo Fukuoka, but, then, I've never read his *One-Straw* book) questioning Intensity & Sub-Annular Production as a value; versus Extensivity & Perennial Creation. It's a farming metaphor at heart - either one crops a super-focussed domesticated & time-bound yielding production (intensive) (domesticated in the sense of confines) - or plants & lets wild crops perennialize back & forth - this latter kind of extension being rather unfashionable. I'm against the notion of annual agricultural production, which, in the notebook entry, I rhymed with intensive use of a "region," & w/"entropy" & wearing out.

A few weeks ago I read a National Science Foundation Colloquium on *Biodiversity* (now in paper, ed. by E.O. Wilson) which felt relevant in some elusive way - e.g. one Daniel Janzen - "many organisms we believe to be safe are really endangered, & those we call endangered are in reality extinct" - or the distinction made by Professors Soulé & Wilcox between "death" & "end to birth" (this is territory your friend Charles Keil was living in a few years ago, I believe). I'm not comfortable with any biogeographical view of habitat, since, for poetry, Mnemosyne & the Muses are elements of habitat too.

These days, when a sort of Joseph Campbell account of myth & religion as an integrating psychological process prevails, I feel it's important to insist that the mythic gods, personages & events are *real* too (as well as being subject-matter or metaphors etc.). Wasson's plants are a reminder of that reality. I'm not sure why poets have been such custodians of the divine poisons, & their states of frenzy, afflatus, magical worlds, etc. René Daumal was onto this, tho poor health & a love of scholarship made him

back off from it. It's a rich area, tho. Flipping thru Mrs. Grieve's Herbal (which is only Europe-centered, plus plants imported since the Renaissance to England), it's astonishing how many traditional English plant names attribute the ownership of the plants to various gods - hundreds to the Devil or Satan alone. Plus the stoning tinctures & beverages were local to each homestead - there was no standard "beer" for instance, but cottage-brewed infusions of local plants in combinations according to lore, availability, & experiment. Fermentation destroyed the pathogens in well-water. I'm convinced the gods were appearing & disappearing in the fields - it's just that when they're awake we're asleep, or juvenile, or sick, or flattered by being able to make something apparently novel - so the marriage is always grossly & sinisterly imperfect - & leads to some pretty major problems.

I think of 2 recent items I've read which stumbled at this point. Kerényi, in *Dionysos*, can't figure out from epigraphy why Dionysos wears Ivy instead of Vitis Vinifera around his head. My herb book says it was to relieve or mitigate intoxication - Ivy was a common remedy. And then Evans-Wentz, in the last section of his *Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries*, winds up with a muddled sort of cop out because he believes that fairies are real entities, but only if you have enough ESP to tune in the astral world (viz - "Pink Elephants are real but I've been unable to see one").



Osprey

Al Glover

Big thrill yesterday: an osprey came to call on me while I was grading a tractor path in the woods at the northwest corner of the garden. Such a bird! He perched at the top of an enormous old oak tree to the west of me, a living emblem of my trip. How I praised him, and then sang and danced while he cocked his fierce head and took it all in. So Drummond's "Vision" has come true for me.



Among, the Inuit

Fred Wah

Beautiful sunny day here in Pond Inlet on Baffin Island - 24c. Been here a week now - one more to come - and feel fine among the Inuit. Foreignness is something I still can't figure out - but it's a good lesson here. The elders in this community as little as 30 years ago were living as nomads of the ice. They only speak Inuktitut, main diet is caribou and seal. They are *healthy* people. The young, with all our "sugar" not so healthy. It's sad. They're on an edge I've only even imagined.

I went to a meeting w/the elders last night, in a Qammuk, a traditional sod-house. They sang a few Ai Ai Yas with a large drum w/a handle on one side. They laugh a lot. I asked one

man, he's only 2 years older than me, if he'd seen any humans who could become animals during his lifetime. He said no, but he'd seen a man's footprints change to polar bear tracks - and then later he had met the man.

The have a nice mmmm-sound in a falling cadence when they talk. The woman I'm staying with made me some seal-skin mitts yesterday so I can go out on the ice today. This village is beautiful, surrounded by mountains and glaciers.



National Tree?

Dan Zimmerman

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I heard on WCBS radio that you're accepting nominations for a national tree - through the American Arbicultural Society, is it? Great idea!

The news report mentioned that you're seeking a tree "lofty enough" to cover or represent the whole country (those maybe the radio announcer's words, rather than yours - I was writing and driving at the same time).

It strikes me that the Bristle-cone Pine (*Pinus aristata*) would be an ideal candidate: certainly, it's 'lofty' enough! It's also a native species, and a nice counterpoint to the national flower, the rose (also 'bristly'). Reward of a long climb, as the oldest living thing it persists in rugged beauty, higher, even than the eagles.

As a tree-man, you must know more about this grizzled wonder than I; I just want to be sure that such a gallant survivor gets its due consideration. My sense is that it's tough to tame, and no lick of lumber at all - that strikes me as expressive of the independent spirit of America. There are, too, spectacular photos of the bristle-cone - by Ansel Adams, I think - which might be readily adapted for commemorative uses.

I won't belabor the case, but there you are. The very best of luck in choosing - and lobbying for - whichever tree seems right. (I'd considered, later, Lodgepole Pine for its phoenix-seeds; Sassafras, for its history as an early commodity for soap and tea, as well as for 'American' diversity, with three kinds of leaves; Ailanthus, that weed called Tree of Heaven, for its ubiquity; Redwood or Sequoia, the former for its height and the latter for its derivation from the famous inventor of the Cherokee alphabet, Sequoyah; and Black Walnut, for its earthy taste - still, Bristle-cone heads the list).

Klärung

We put the wrong French doohickie on Musès' name.

Misspelled Redgrove.

And *Phenomenological!*

Well, the point is it's out, from Glover Pub., Box 685, Canton, N.Y. 13617.

