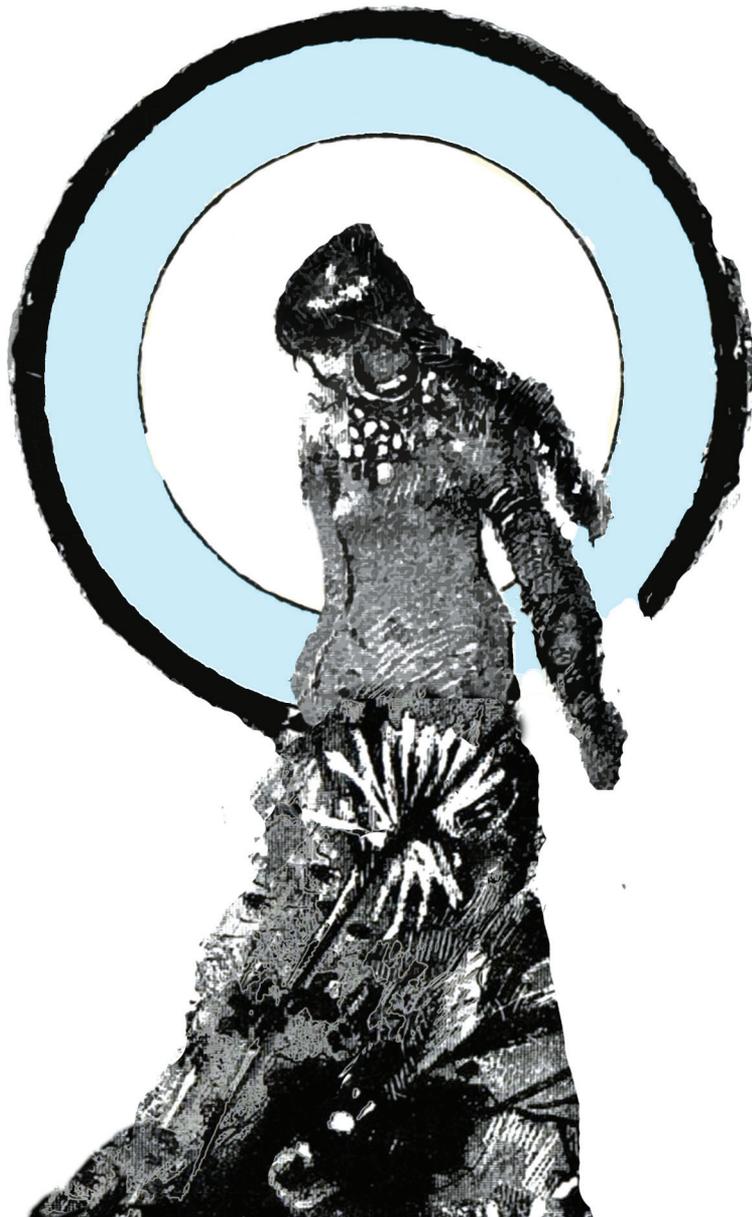


The Snow Witch Themes



Thank you so much for your interest in The Snow Witch Art Exhibition, that takes place this Autumn during Darkfest 2019. I'm honoured you should choose to be a part of it.

The following pages were written as a simple response to my novel The Snow Witch to give you, the artist some ideas with which you might start your own explorations and light your own creative fire.

None of what I write here is set in stone. It misses out loads and I'm sure you'll have your own angle. But here it is: a collection of personal feelings about the book. It's not a rule book. It's just there to act as tinder to light the creative fire I love so much in everyone.

So, I hope you enjoy. Be amazing. I know that creativity makes my life every day worth living, saving it from colourlessness and joylessness and I thank you for sharing yours with me.

I love that you create. Long may you make things! Let's do something marvellous...

Matt.

Introduction

The starting point for *The Snow Witch* was a chance meeting I had in Palmerston Road with a charismatic violinist. She told me she was travelling Europe and earning her living from writing. This struck me as a deeply romantic and exciting thing to be doing, and her charisma and poise stayed with me long after we'd parted company. She kept coming back to me, and my initial conception was to take something light, airy and joyous like Joanne Harris's *Chocolat* and set it in Portsmouth.

This did not last long, however, as the story mingled with my own preoccupations at the time, and a very dark period I was going through. I found that through the unfolding of the story I could heal myself. And that became one of the running themes through the book.

Below are some more of the themes.



Art

Another running theme in the book is the healing nature of art and the healing nature of imagination, if used wisely. Hence, as a girl, Donitza is enjoined to perform music during her studies and she is invited to imagine and learn. She is taught to see the resemblances between things that are symbolic and not necessarily logical - and to make connections that go back to a far older way of thinking about the world. For me, this really is how Art is connected to magic. It shapes the world in new ways. And it can cure.

Donitza lives in a world in which artistic connections and symbolic connections are as real as the world of hard facts and things. In many ways, I've tried to recreate the mind of the child who sees connections and hasn't yet had that sense of wonder wiped out by being an adult.

Hence, during one cure Donitza performs, she kills a sickness with the correct uses of herbs at the same time that the Bowman Orion in the night sky shoots the Great Bear.

Donitza's world in this sense is holistic. That is why art is at the centre of the story. But Art is not always healing, and that



is a question of love and intention. After all, while Donitza is a musician, so is Riley.

Eddie, too, is a maker. The act of building things gives him a sense of completeness and a sense of control in his life. I think most artists would understand that need to create in order to stay sane and in control of at least your own mental landscape. Rituals of healing can be the daubing of paint, the singing of songs, the creation of temples and sculptures or the telling of a tale.

Donitza's mother's life is also about creation. It is about exploring the world of the mind and passing on that view to her daughter. Her world is also about craft - the craft of witchcraft - and the way that stories shape the world.

Lissitch is also a storyteller. What we don't know about Lissitch is who he is, and what his motives are. Thus we don't know if his stories are reliable. We certainly don't know his intention.

Snow

Snow has several meanings in the book:

Primarily it's to do with memory, and with someone getting stuck in a rut - frozen in a particular space.

The lost soul experiences a world which is alien, deadening and full of unreadable signs. The snowbound world has all

those eerie elements of walking alone in the snow - the quietness, the strange emptiness, the sense of disorientation by being surrounded by whiteness.

Snow is also about covering things up. It's about suppressing memory, and about how vital elements and life-giving forces can be lost under a layer of inaction, when someone is psychologically frozen because they cannot face something that lies beneath.



It thus is also about memory. Sometimes we might turn to white powder because of the pain of memory. That white powder might be heroin, snow, cocaine - an anodyne and a search for oblivion in order to forget the pain of the present.





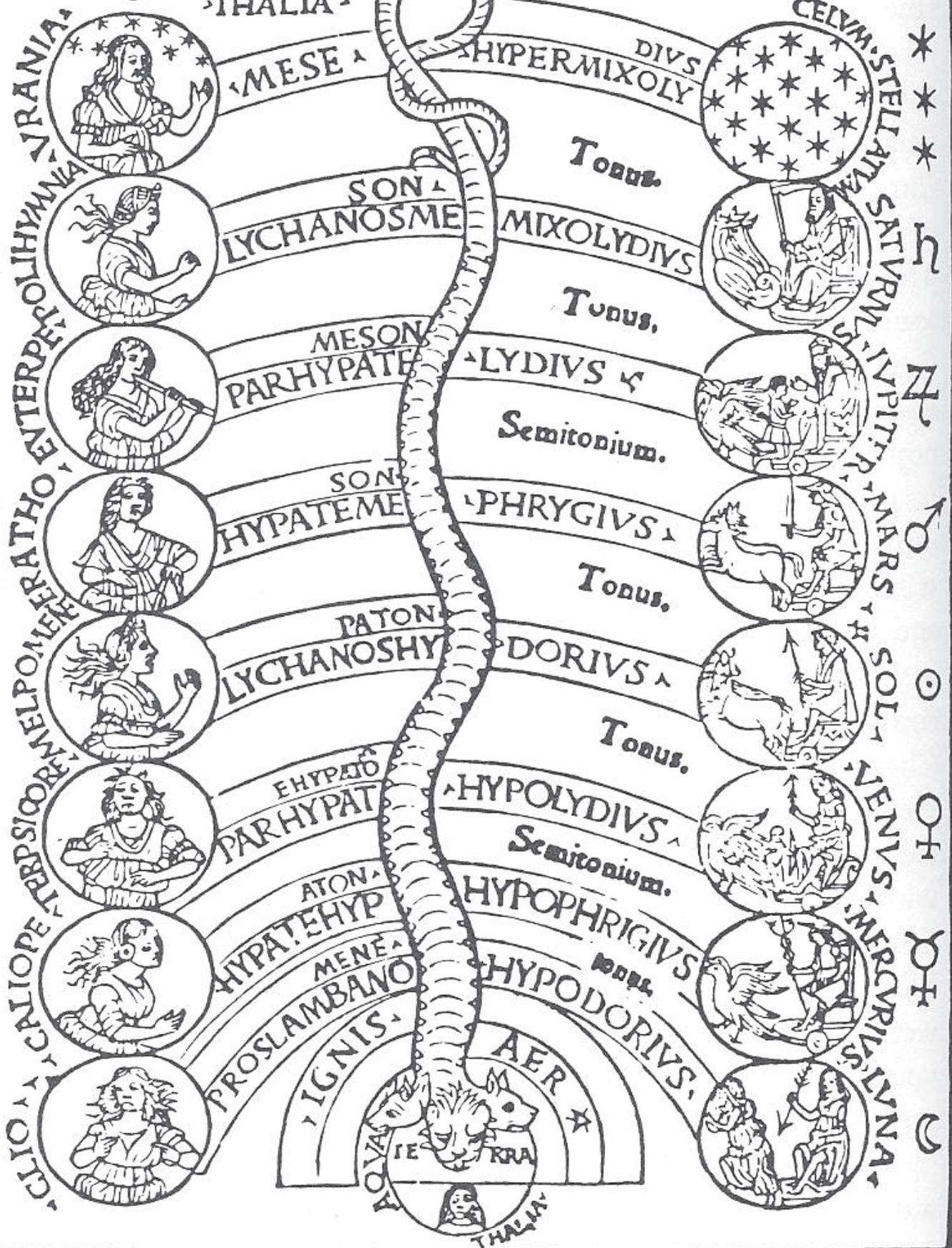
MENTIS · APOLLINEAE · VIS · HAS · MOVET · VNDIQVE ·

EVPHROSINE

AGLAIA

APOLLO

THALIA



Music

The language of music is one of raw emotion, and it is extraordinary how people's lives are changed by the emotional shift that comes with it. For me, it is one of the most complete forms of art - drawing together storytelling, rhythm, creating dance, voice and even the sculpture of an instrument, and its fine design and painting. There is magic in it, and in the pulse of the universe which beats out its unceasing time, counting bars as generations and movements as epochs.

On another level, the music which is used in the magic of The Snow Witch draws on the Pythagorean idea of the Music of the Spheres.

Pythagoras is credited with discovering that a string under tension produces a sound proportionate to its length. Halve the length, double the pitch.

Hence, distance and sound are connected. With this in mind, Pythagoras put forward the idea that the distances between planets also meant that sun, moon and planets produced their own distinct frequencies of sound which affected life on Earth through the distant mystical forces. After all, if a lyre can change emotions, how much more influence can the Harmony of the Spheres have on us?

Thus, astrology and astronomy are not only understandings of what we see but what we hear - and manipulation of sound has an influence on the world and our understanding of it. All is connected,

I was part inspired in this view of music by Tolkien's Silmarillion, in which Middle Earth is sung into being by Eru, the One.



ORBIUM PLANTARUM COMITIUM SCENO

SPHÆRA ZODIACI
SPHÆRA SATVRNI
SPHÆRA IUPITER
SPHÆRA MARS

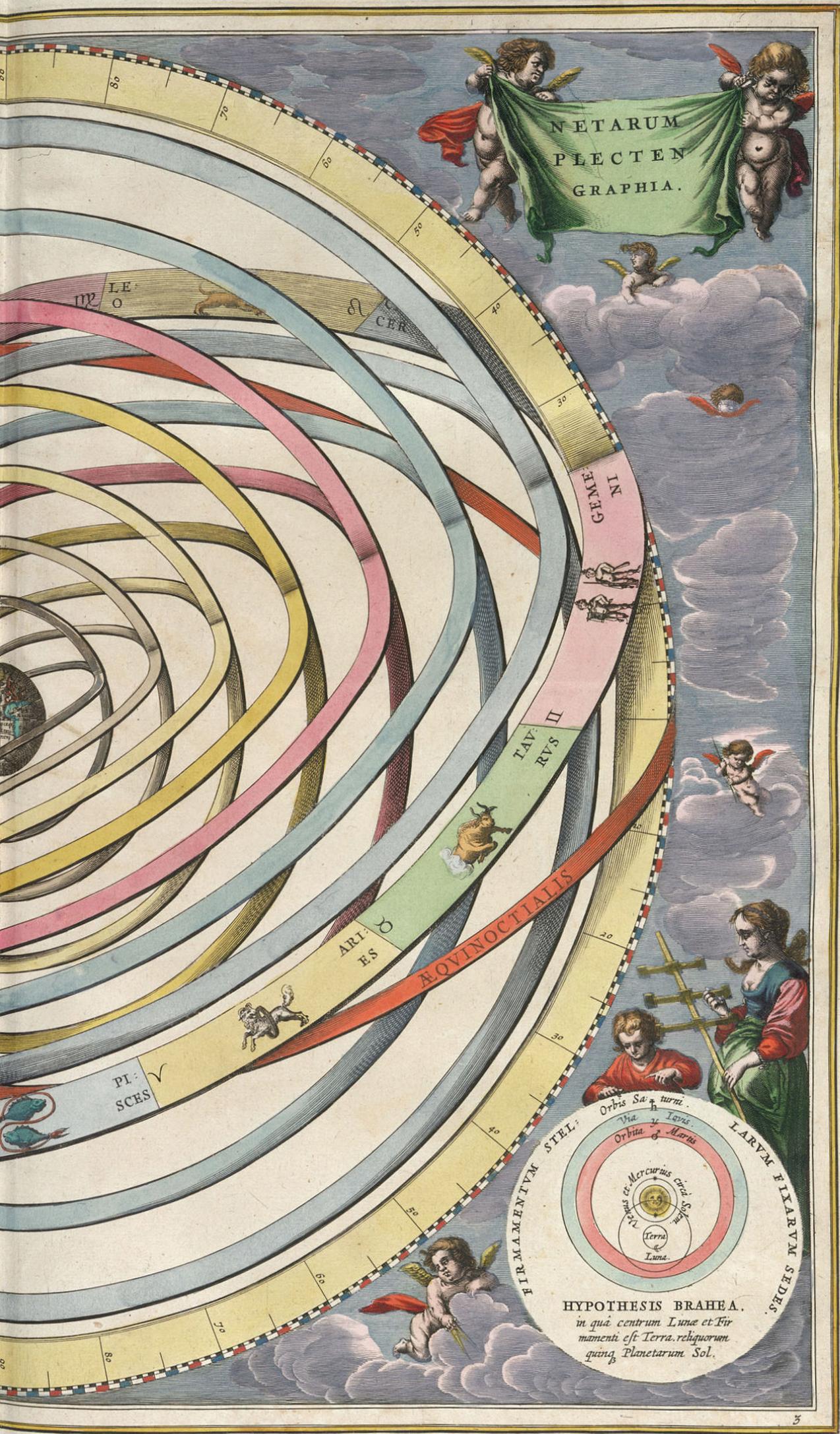
SPHÆRA SOLIS
SPHÆRA VENUS
SPHÆRA MERCURI

HYPOTHESIS PTOLEMAICA,
in qua Terra totius Univerſi
centrum.

CIRCVLVS

CAPRI-CORNVS

AQVA-RIVS



Feminism and the Divine Feminine



Over the years I've come to understand some of the power dynamics that go on in society. For me personally, the advent of social media meant I couldn't ignore the fact that there is a whole strand of male thought and behaviour that is deeply misogynistic.

I also consider that conventional religion embodies much of that misogyny, with its emphasis on the father and the diminution of women's roles. I give a talk on that subject sometimes - Women, Sex and Spiritualism.

Donitza represents to me a physical form, a particular archetype of the dark-haired, slim young woman, independent-minded, frail, magical and vulnerable and ultimately strong that I find utterly compelling. She has a kind of numinous, that is, religious, presence that I admit to being obsessed with.

My thought in the book was how you turn that Goddess figure - which haunts many people's unconscious and forms their religious instinct - into somebody who is real and human.

That is how the brilliant, deep and powerful Donitza crystallised in my mind. She's a type to do with the muses and specifically Euterpe, the goddess of music - one of the powerful guardians of culture from Greek mythology. She stands against Barbarism. She is art, and specifically music, embodied.

Transformation

Many of the great Fairy Tales are stories of transformation. It's a wonderful theme that also goes back to Ovid's metamorphoses, Apuleius's Golden Ass, through the Bible with Lot's wife and even to the first written story, the Epic of Gilgamesh in which a cruel ruler is transformed into one who is wise. Thus positive change and story are intertwined.

Transformation in *The Snow Witch* is multifold. Donitza is stuck in a past from which she cannot escape, and the only way to do so is for her to change.

Riley changes, in a very different way.

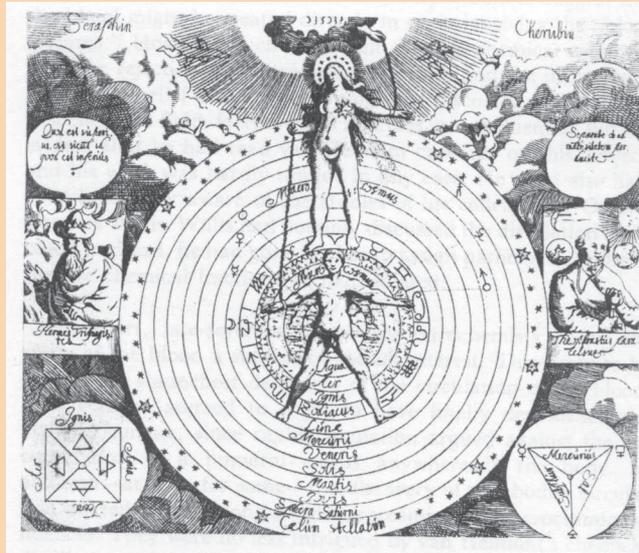
Lissitch transforms. He is the classic shapeshifter trickster of ancient stories, that include, for example, Loki from Norse mythology, or the Green Knight from British legend. Another shapeshifter is Ulysses - another trickster with deadly intent.

There are numerous shifts in reality in the book, as a kind of hallucinatory reality builds up in which you start to lose the idea of what is real and what is imagined.

The werewolf, of course, is another transformer, and echoes of the idea of the heartless savage wolf appear throughout the book.



Scale

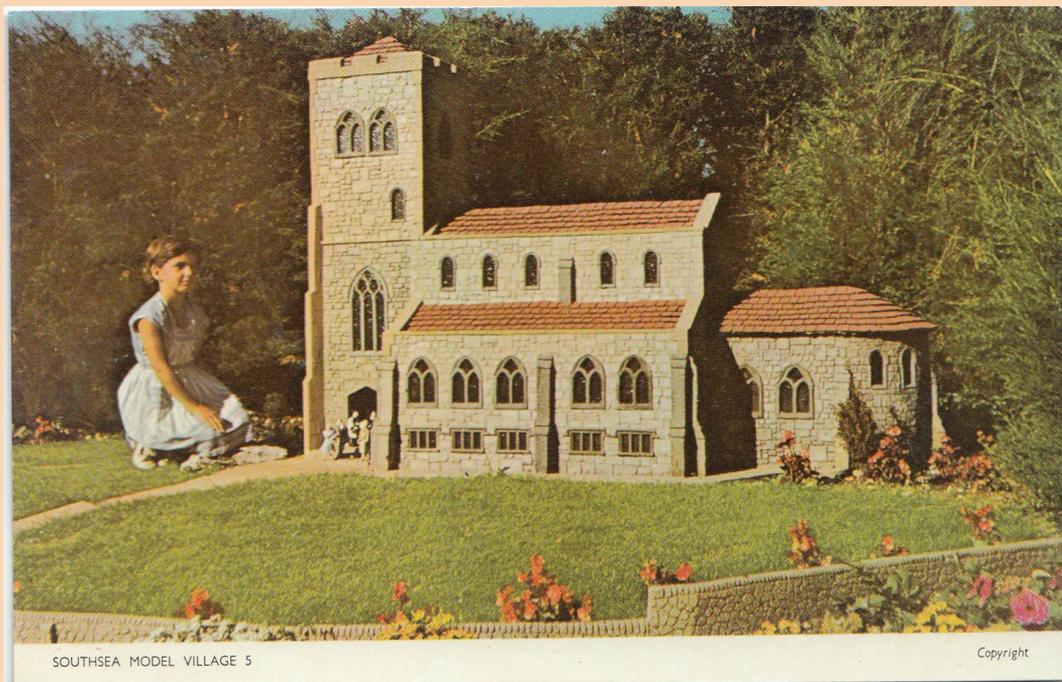


The idea of giants and shrunken creatures are part of the mix. For Eddy, the notion of a world too big to carry is at odds with his love of the model village. Here, he is in control of a world he can manage. In many ways this is the state of many artists, seeking to have at least some sense of peace and calm in a mad world, a small kingdom within which to rule benignly. This is not true for all artists, but most definitely is for the maker who is Eddy.

Of course, the model village is an echo of the home Donitza used to live in, in the Balkans.

The idea of miniature action firing massive responses occurs throughout, and vice versa. Massive movements of planets in the sky affect the healing of a man in a cave in a forest. A bird that grows from a stone is a tiny thing, but implies a massive world of wonder beyond the mundane.

A hamster is a small an irrelevant creature, yet cruelty to it reveals just how monstrous



SOUTHSEA MODEL VILLAGE 5

Copyright



IOB. Cap. XXXVIII. v. 31.
Orion, כִּסְלִי Cefil.

Job's High Cap. XXXVIII. v. 31.
Der Orion.

Animals



Wolf

In the book I used the idea of The Wolf over and again. Part of my research for this book was Sabine Baring-Gould's *The Book of Werewolves*, which is an extraordinary study of accounts of werewolves going back into the ancient past.



The werewolf is shown as the man whom society cannot trust. He is cruel, rapacious and out of control. Donitza encounters what may or may not be a werewolf under the guidance of her mother.

We also have the “little piggies” whom Riley bullies at the beginning of the story.

Donitza encounters the wolf militia in the mountains. And she encounters the evil that is Riley in Portsmouth's streets.

Fox

The Fox I use deliberately throughout as an ambiguous symbol. Is he the hero of his own story, or the villain of Donitza's? In Portsmouth we encounter foxes all the time.

There is something smart, resourceful and utterly self-serving in the fox. No wonder he is so often seen as a devilish figure.

All the animals are imbued with knowledge and a presence that is beyond considering them just as animal - but the Fox is especially so. We do not know his motives at all. Unlike the wolf, he is unpredictable and unreadable.



Magic

Magic has its place in the book, throughout. But it is not the simplistic magic of Harry Potter. It is in many ways an artistic response to the world, in which various elements, music, herbalism, imagination, song, poetry, imagery and ritual are drawn together to make a whole world view. I wanted the magic to be mysterious and to be something that only a skilled person could use intuitively. As I've said before, in many ways it is a metaphor for creativity and for ways of transforming the evils in the world in to something that is at least manageable.



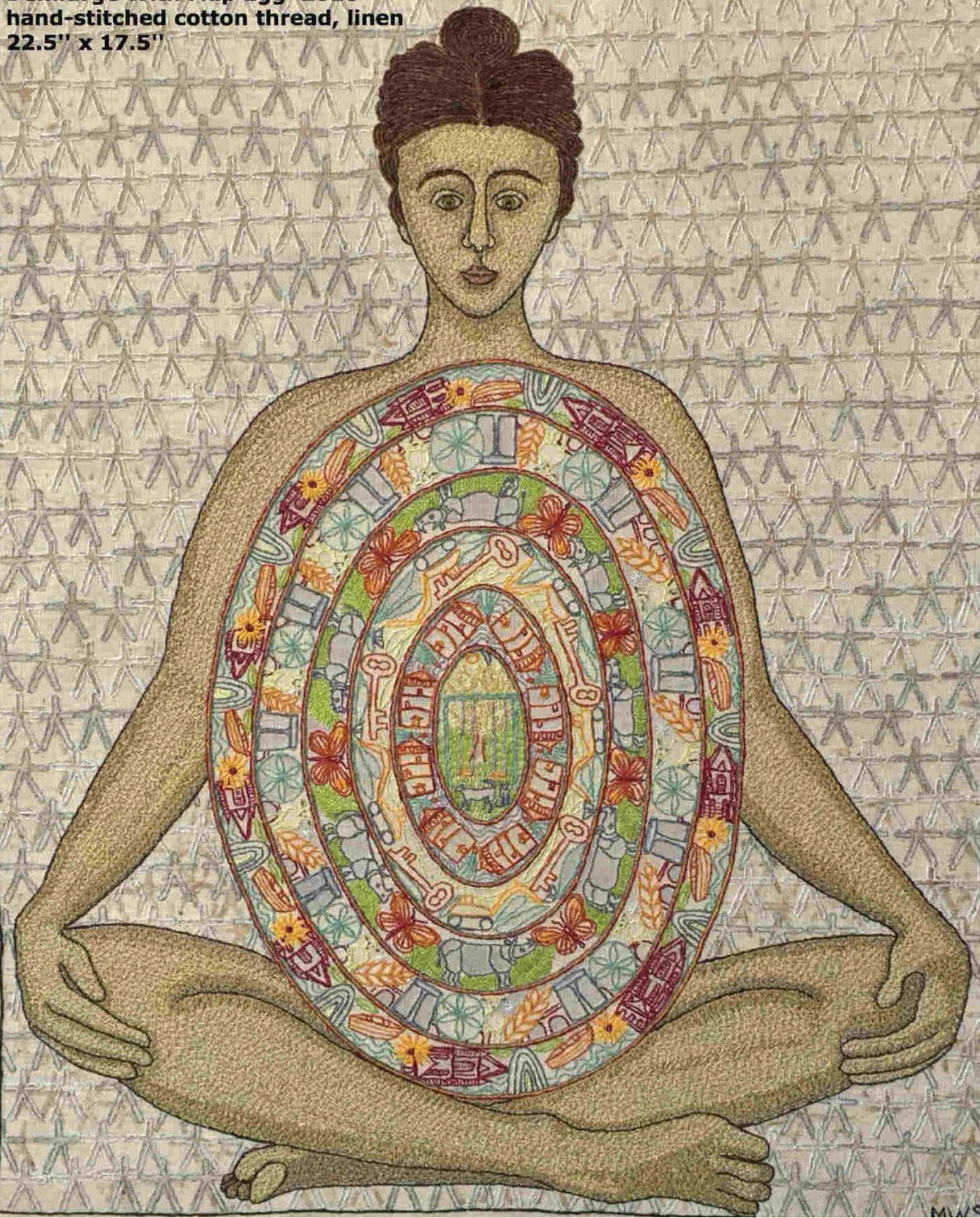


DEUT. Cap. IV. v. 19.

Ασρολατεία.

V. Buch Moses Cap. IV. v. 19.
Abaottischer Holstein - Diener

Martha Shade
Demiurge With Map Egg 2016
hand-stitched cotton thread, linen
22.5" x 17.5"



Healing Art

This, also, is why the craft of magic is about healing. Magic is, in a way, art therapy. It is aimed at transforming the internal landscape of the shaman or witch as much as it is about changing the world “out there”.

When Donitza uses magic for another purpose than healing, she is wracked with remorse. Magic is not a moral entity, but its use requires wisdom and a degree of kindness. Using it in another way has its own ramifications.

The effect of music on Eddie is also healing. He senses something good in Donitza through her music. It holds him in a way that he can't explain or express.

I have said it before, and I will say it again. Artists are magicians, witches, makers of the divine craft, creators of ritual, givers of meaning. You, an artist, are miraculous.



Adam / The Red Man

One of the recurring themes in the book is the idea of Adam, also known as the Red Man. The word Adam signifies the red clay from which God in myth created mankind.

Yet the red man can also be a more devilish figures of the Christians and the Muslims in the story. That Lissitch's hair is red, as is the fox, as is the peacekeeper shows the strange ambiguity of the world of men, of the world of good and evil, which Donitza struggles to understand.



Lilith

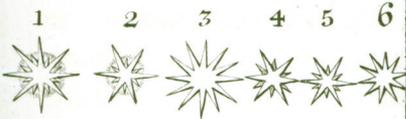


Lilith is a fascinating figure. Ancient Hebrew mythology states that she was Adam's first wife, before he finally married Eve.

She was a being of secret and arcane knowledge, and she was able to use her knowledge on others. Adam grew tired of her waywardness and independent thinking, and demanded that God provide him with another wife.

Yet Lilith, that mysterious dark haired type, I confess haunts my imagination. She is, in many ways, female knowledge and power that surpasses man. She is most likely a vestige of the ancient female religion that existed before Yahweh was invented and promoted above all other gods and goddesses by the priest class in the Ancient Middle East.

Stellarum

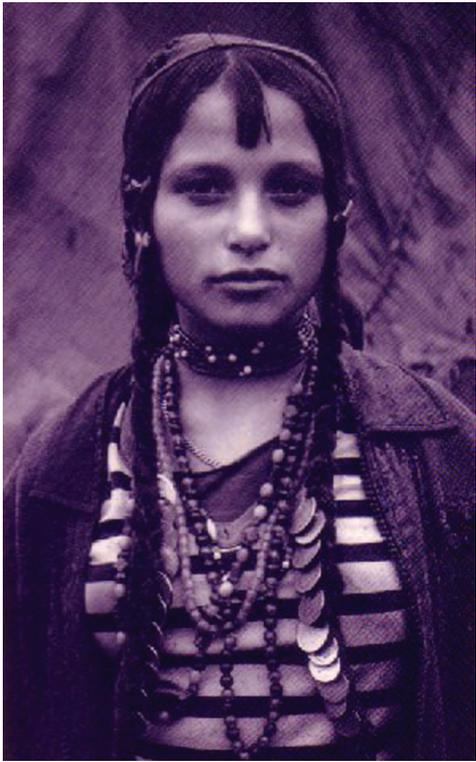


magnitudines



GENESIS Cap. XV. v. 5.
Stella innumerabiles:

I. Buch Mosıs Cap. XV. v. 5.
Die unzählbare Sternen Zahl.



Thank you!

