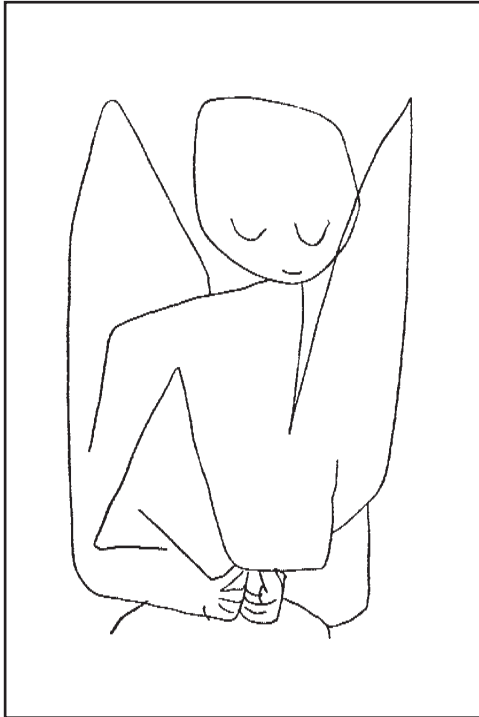


A Small Book on Gold



*The Temple
The Windmill*

I Like to Explore the Relationship between Myself and the Universe

Compassion

Dreaming in the Language of Angels

G O L D

The Temple

I'm building the temple
stone by stone,
raising statues of women,
raising statues of men.
I've constructed an altar
of oyster shells and olive branches.
Any peasant can make an offering—
rusty nails, bent and broken,
old keys that open nothing and go nowhere,
dead flowers, spent candles, poems.
My temple has no walls, no doors.
Sunlight flows between the columns.
All are welcome
to slip in and admire the moon,
or leave, if it's late and they must,
stealing across the meadow,
the hillside white with dew,
the city burning below,
knowing there is a god,
never looking back.

The Windmill

I no longer take myself downtown
and lie on a doctor's sofa.
Instead, I've come to enjoy the few minutes
I lie on my own sofa,
books piled high beside me,
ceaselessly musing,
a friendly little spider
like Whitman's
dangling from the ceiling,
its cobweb catching the light.
Little is asked of me
during these moments of quietude and peace
and I am free to meditate
on the tufted silk
of the red pleated lampshade
glowing at the foot of the stairs.
Because of my wife
and her lifelong affair
with lamps,
I've come to know
all sorts of lampshades—
candelabra shades, coolie shades,
drums, empire, bell—
and to take delight in the sculpted finials
atop the lamps in our house,
finials that are like little statues,
little heralds or emblems
made of metal, stone, crystal, and wood.
One snowy Christmas,
my wife gave me a lampshade,
a barrel lampshade with golden polka dots.
The crazy lampshade is now the crowning glory
of the iron floor lamp that towers over
and guards my sofa reveries.
The warm light shines through the polka dots

onto an antique leather screen
handed down to me many years ago by my mother.
Painted on the leather screen
is a serene Dutch landscape
with a dreamlike old village by a peaceful river.
In the Holland of my mind
I am free.
I walk by the water
beneath an old windmill and its cross of golden sails.

*I Like to Explore the Relationship
between Myself and the Universe*

In the high-ceilinged gallery
filled with elegant color-fields—
ravishing golds and eternal blues—
I fell in love with a painting's title.

The title's exuberance
and lack of modesty
encompassed everything:
the barbs on the vane of a feather,
the hasp on a chest-lid,
gravity, lightning,
even ancient masters of poetry
in a moon-watching pavilion,
languidly lifting their sweeping silk sleeves
before inking brushes
to compose—

a woman hurrying over a bridge,
a river crane disappearing in mist,
the mountain road ascending into clouds.

Compassion

At dawn, a sparrow
on a high black branch, singing,
thinking spring has come.

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My old wooden fence—
gap-toothed, rotting, falling down,
yet younger than I.

*

Kwan Yin stands alone
among the garden's flowers—
what is she thinking?

*

No one cares how small
the ember is you bring us—
it will start a fire.

Dreaming in the Language of Angels

Wearing a captain's hat and uniform
my infirm father sails a brigantine
across winter seas to frozen Russia.

In the mansions of St. Petersburg
his wife debates sanity's reward
versus delirium's buoyant virtues.

In the palace, half-dreaming on the tsar's settee,
coat unbuttoned, I recite my life's story
in French, the language of angels.

Back in America, Jones Very was weeping
because his loved ones doubted the vision
of his divinely inspired poetry.