

## Moon Watch

Gold fiery sun, iron grey Mercury, blood red Mars, then our sapphire Earth with its sea pearl satellite, the moon.

The sun hides behind its blinding glare, the stars glitter galaxies away, pin pricks in the night sky, but our neighbour the moon reveals itself to the naked eye, evidence of planets and other worlds, feeding our imagination.

To me the moon is female, benign and mysterious. Born of the earth she orbits her mother. Her gravitational pull rules the ebb and flow of the tides. Sea creatures phosphoresce in her light. Seeds germinate at full moon. Our watery bodies respond as she waxes and wanes. Myths bind our mood and fertility to her phases. Witches blend their potions and cast their spells at potent points in the lunar calendar.

For others the moon is unstable and malign. Lunatics and werewolves appear at the height of her presence. Vampires fly and creatures of the night hunt their victims. She reminds us of our insignificance in the vast universe and observes our puny attempts to conquer the heavens. Her absences signify ageing, loss, death. Her dark side is never revealed.

This dichotomy is reflected in the different moon stories throughout the world. Chang'e, a beautiful Chinese woman stole and drank a bottle of the elixir of life from her husband and flew to the moon where her husband could never reach her. Mawu (an African moon god) and his wife the sun are famous for their love making during lunar and solar eclipses. Anningnan/Igaluk in Greenland and Alaskan mythology raped his sister the sun and now pursues her relentlessly. The Mayan moon goddess Ixchel represents fertility but also its loss. The crescent moon is both a symbol of Islam and the Virgin Mary.

In Roman and Greek mythology the moon has many goddesses: Selene, Cynthia, Artemis, Hecate, Diana, Luna. Our language and culture are littered with lunar references: blue moon, blood moon, harvest moon, fly me to the moon, shoot the moon, ask for the moon, over the moon, love you to the moon and back.

Thousands of miles away and yet reachable, touchable almost, the moon hangs in the sky gently gleaming. Our celestial neighbour orbits protectively around the Earth, an unjudging, unblinking witness to our fleeting lives. *We are such stuff as dreams are made on and our little life is rounded with a sleep* - words written by William Shakespeare under the same moon that saw Van Gogh paint *Starry Night*, Beethoven writ *Moonlight Sonata*, the development of space travel. She remained an impassive spectator of war, genocide, the atom bomb. She did not flinch when Apollo 11 landed on her soft skin. But she saw all this, cannot unsee, and she will continue to watch long after humanity has disappeared.