



## Paintsplaining: From *Psychoanalysis of Fire* by Gaston Bachelard (1938)

### 1. Cursed punch

"How did this cursed punch manage to go to our heads and cause us to commit a thousand follies?" These were the words of Professor Paulmann when, on the following morning, he entered the room that was still strewn with broken mugs, in the midst of which the unfortunate periwig, reduced to its primary elements, was floating about, dissolved in an ocean of punch." (86)

### 2. Empedocles jumping into a volcano

"The Last Judgment, the destruction of the world by fire and the absorption of the human soul into the soul of fire is the 'Empedocles complex.'" (viii)

### 3. Vomiting flames

"[...]The image of the man vomiting forth flames while dancing is a favorite image of the unconscious." (74)

### 4. Funeral pyre (ft. the Ekphrastic Peanut Butter Sandwich)

"In these circumstances, the reverie becomes truly fascinating and dramatic; it magnifies human destiny; it links the small to the great, the hearth to the volcano, the life of a log to the life of a world. The fascinated individual hears the *call of the funeral pyre*." (16)

### 5. Ant's eye view of burning log

"But, as if to give us a better indication of the true axis of his magnifying reverie, the author continues: Why have I not the eyes of an ant in order to admire this burning birch log?" (17)

### 6. Ghouls in a melancholy nook

"It is near the swamps, the dismal tarns and pools 'Where dwell the Ghouls, By each spot the most unholy, In each nook most melancholy.'" (91)

### 7. Sensitive plant

"Some very special characteristics [...] are thus explained by a mere reference to an inner fire. [...] Thus the sensitive plant (mimosa pudica) requires more of this fire than any other plant or natural thing." (70)

### 8. Sulfuric acid ("Piranha") solution

"How many times have I seen my pupils amazed at the calcination of a cork through the action of sulfuric acid. [...] 'Psychoanalytically, the will to destroy is a coefficient of the destructive property recognized in the acid.'" (78)

### 9. Suggestive alchemical implements

"[...] The furnaces and retorts used by the alchemists had undeniable sexual shapes." (51)

### 10. Prismatic animal life cycle

"These animals, in passing through the prism, will each be obliged to suffer refraction according to its strength and age, and thus each will bear its own color." (45)

### 11. Noblewoman massaged crimson

"[She] was reclining on a throne artistically carved from an enormous sulphur crystal, and some maidservants were energetically rubbing her delicate limbs, which seemed a blend of milky whiteness and crimson." (38)

### 12. Spontaneous combustion

"Have we not seen drunkards, whose bodies were superabundantly impregnated with burning spirits because of the habitual excessive drinking of strong liquor, who have suddenly caught fire of themselves and have been consumed by spontaneous combustion?" (95)

### 13. Animals stealing fire on their tails

"The one stealing the fire is most often a bird [...] Sometimes it is a rabbit, a badger, or a fox who carries off the fire at the end of its tail. (35)

### 14. Birthday candles in effigy

"The reflex which makes us pull back our finger from the flame of a candle does not play any conscious role in our knowledge about fire." (74)

### 15. Laurel leaves as cure for acne

"The laurel cures ulcers of the head and removes facial blemishes." (70)

### 16. Pyromaniac shepherds

"Almost always, a case of incendiarism in the country is the sign of the diseased mind of some shepherd." (13)

## "What does painting have to say to Gnosticism in 2025?"

I input a list of formal and conceptual throughlines for *Samaritans* into Chat-GPT, and asked how these ideas might relate to Gnosticism. Gnosticism is the umbrella term for a group of early Christian belief systems converging on the idea of *gnosis*, or esoteric knowledge. Chat-GPT mostly framed my aesthetic inclinations as metaphors for the regrettable mixture between the material world and the higher realm of ideals. The philosophical inheritance of Gnosticism (with its antihuman "Alien God,") negotiates between two poles: a paranoid conception of universal connectedness (religiousity, elaborate pattern formation, labyrinths of knowledge) and a nihilistic, structureless universe. For me, this is all invoked, microcosmically, in the recent legal crackdown on food coloring. -LH

### Samaritans Gnostic Glossary by Chat-GPT

#### Mixing/Matching Colors

This echoes the **Gnostic layering of realities**—a cosmology where Aeons pair off, break apart, and hybridize. The mix-and-match is both aesthetic and metaphysical: a refusal of pure categories. Color itself is a metaphor for **emanations**—the visual bleed-through of one plane into another.

Finally, life alone is capable of supplying a *profound inner* reason for the obvious individuality of colors. To explain the seven colors of the spectrum Robinet does not hesitate to propose "seven ages or periods in the life of the igneous animalculae . . . These animals, in passing through the prism, will each be obliged to suffer refraction according to its strength and age and thus each will bear its own color." Is it not true that the dying fire turns red?

#### Confusion Over Values ("Samaritans")

Gnosticism rejects conventional morality; the Demiurge *thinks* he's God and imposes fake laws. The idea that this work lacks a "theory of virtue" aligns with the **Gnostic suspicion of ethics as a trick**. "Samaritans" evokes a kind of moral misrecognition—a helpful figure from a "wrong" system. Like Sophia's fall, it's well-meaning but misplaced.

#### Chapter Book Covers

This is the **aesthetic of early gnosis**—children's books that were secretly terrifying. Cover art as threshold: colorful, symbolic, flat—offering portals to trauma or forgotten truths. Think of them as **proto-codices**, masking sacred violence in innocence.

#### Shallow Compositions

Gnosticism is a cosmology of **flattened hierarchies and collapsed dimensions**. The real world is a shallow copy of the pleroma (the true realm of fullness). Shallow art reflects this **impoverishment**—a

deliberately fallen composition. No depth = no transcendence = you're stuck here.

#### Homology / Similitude

Gnosticism operates through **correspondences**—the spiritual mirrors the material. Your idea of using *brushes with short fur* to paint *fur* is an occult logic: microcosm reflects macrocosm. It's magical thinking with a painter's toolkit. Aesthetic homology becomes **ritual mimesis**.

#### Counterfactuals

A world of infinite branching timelines echoes Gnostic multiplicity: the true world is inaccessible, but its echoes haunt this one. Counterfactuals are a way to say, "this isn't real, but something else could be." They're **spiritual longing refracted as narrative games**.

#### Repressed Memory Syndrome (after Mike Kelley)

This is modern gnosis: **trauma as origin**, memory as labyrinth, the past as a corrupted file. Kelley's work digs into **abjection and fragmented selves**, which are totally Gnostic—souls broken by incarnation, misremembering their divine source.

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Memory Tracer

Suggestibility Results:

white

If you typed in a color, you are probably suggestible. People cannot recall anything before the age of one. It is also possible you possess *vivid imagery*, which may result in "remembering" something which isn't there.

If you could *not* remember a color, chances are likely your memory is not easily suggestible.

The Childhood Memory Test is actually a test for Suggestibility. If you thought you could remember a color, it could mean you accepted the "suggestion" that you'd have a memory of it - which you typed in. If no crib color was recalled, then it's likely you're not suggestible to any false memories.