



From Gabriel to Lucifer: A Cultural History of Angels

Valery Rees

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'Fiery the angels fell; slow thunder rolled around their shores, burning with the fires of Orc.' Whether in recent popular culture, or back across countless centuries, angels have perpetually enthralled and even terrified us. 'Every single angel is terrible,' wrote the German Romantic poet Rilke: 'and so I hold myself back from the dark bird-cry of my anguished sobbing.' For skeptics, angels may be no more than metaphors: poetic devices to convey, at least for those with a religious sensibility, an active divine interest in creation. But for others, angels are absolutely real creatures: manifestations of cosmic power with the capacity either to enlighten or annihilate those whose awestruck paths they cross. Valery Rees offers the first comprehensive history of these beautiful, enigmatic and sometimes dangerous beings, whose existence and actions have been charted across the eons of time and civilization. Whether exploring the fevered visions of Ezekiel and biblical cherubim; Persian genii; Arab djinn; Islamic archangels; the austere and haunting icons of Andrei Rublev; or Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire* and the more benign idea of the watchful guardian angel, the author shows that the ubiquity of these celestial messengers reveals something profound, if not about God or the devil, then about ourselves: our perennial preoccupation with the transcendent.

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