

Approaches to Light

Spring 2019

From 5:49 to 6:17 on the morning April 13, 2019, four groups of people quietly contemplated the same astronomical phenomenon. The modest star of a solar system on the outer arm of a spiral galaxy rose into the sky over a particular spot on the system's third planet. Standing in the pre-dawn chill, listening to the mingled acoustic ecologies of Coconino National Forest and Route 66, we contemplated the unfolding of many stories. Everyone has a story about the sun, its comings and goings, and the way it paints a way for us through the world.

This biography of a dawn traces one particular sunrise through poetry, photography, and lived experience as it played out from four different vantage points on the San Francisco Peaks.







Biography of a Dawn

5

A frost-stilled spiral.
Agave leaves gaze up
at the lightening sky.

Crumbled tailings of old arguments
between the mountain, the fire, the sky
mingle underfoot with high country grass
too stubborn to die.

All of it, all of us
gazing up at the gathering force
of blue above, a color so vast
it plays the trees and the peaks,
reaching down to pluck each one
like strings in a toy piano.

Silent, lending our breath
to the slow inspiration around us,
we see the same marvel
everyone always never sees.

The mountain greets the sun,
the sun ignites the sky,
while we gaze on,
children at a wedding
never quite sure when it happens
the moment, the promise,
the fresh beginning.





Not knowing when the dawn will come
I open every door;
Or has it feathers like a bird,
Or billows like a shore?



It seems to me that the astronomer confronted with the mysteries of dark matter and dark energy and the artist trying to make sensible the very real but incommensurable phenomena of quantum mechanics find themselves in a connected search for a Sublime, for those moments of an inkling of a perhaps awful larger context that we only glimpse partially. For the scientist the potential horror in the Sublime would be the incomprehensibility, unrepresentability, of the world; perhaps for the artist the reverse?



Before reaching the plateau of the circular rim, there was a moment where I could not see any land in front of the car. It felt as if we would continue riding into the sky, or we would tip over and roll downward into the crater itself.

The first thing I remember seeing were these chartreuse hills and emerald mountains in the north that were bathed in sunlight. The golden rays produced by what was able to escape from the massive dark grey rain clouds in the west that covered their own set of mountains. In the south there was a massive brown and grey valley with soft drafts of rain falling into them, visible thanks to the wispy clouds that were pulled downward by the vapor. Finally, in the east we saw the Painted Desert. The palettes of color smattered throughout the land looked like they had indeed been painted.

Later, we were able to absorb more of the Painted Desert's color and the geographic details of the land. On first glance, the area looked flat, but on closer inspection you could see ridges, fissures, hills, and the shadow of the crater. This area was incredibly easy to meditate in. I can't remember the last time I was in a place without technology, construction noise, or stress.

Sophia Burgess

The few moments that we sat in absolute silence watching the sky slowly evolve was just captivating. Hearing the soft, distant echoes of the wind above ground accompanied by an ellipse of deepening dark blue as the sun set was a sight I will never forget.

Gina Xu

From the materiality under my feet, the vastness of the sky, and the echoes of my steps - I've never felt so small and yet such a strong belonging to Earth.

Samantha Vo







Dawn

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Day's sweetest moments are at dawn;
Refreshed by his long sleep, the Light
Kisses the languid lips of Night,
Ere she can rise and hasten on.
All glowing from his dreamless rest
He holds her closely to his breast,
Warm lip to lip and limb to limb,
Until she dies for love of him.



Aubade

I work all day, and get half-drunk at night.
 Waking at four to soundless dark, I stare.
 In time the curtain-edges will grow light.
 Till then I see what's really always there:
 Unresting death, a whole day nearer now,
 Making all thought impossible but how
 And where and when I shall myself die.
 Arid interrogation: yet the dread
 Of dying, and being dead,
 Flashes afresh to hold and horrify.

The mind blanks at the glare. Not in remorse
 —The good not done, the love not given, time
 Torn off unused—nor wretchedly because
 An only life can take so long to climb
 Clear of its wrong beginnings, and may never;
 But at the total emptiness for ever,
 The sure extinction that we travel to
 And shall be lost in always. Not to be here,
 Not to be anywhere,
 And soon; nothing more terrible, nothing more true.

This is a special way of being afraid
 No trick dispels. Religion used to try,
 That vast, moth-eaten musical brocade
 Created to pretend we never die,
 And specious stuff that says *No rational being
 Can fear a thing it will not feel, not seeing*
 That this is what we fear—no sight, no sound,
 No touch or taste or smell, nothing to think with,
 Nothing to love or link with,
 The anasthetic from which none come round.

And so it stays just on the edge of vision,
 A small, unfocused blur, a standing chill
 That slows each impulse down to indecision.
 Most things may never happen: this one will,
 And realisation of it rages out
 In furnace-fear when we are caught without
 People or drink. Courage is no good:
 It means not scaring others. Being brave
 Lets no one off the grave.
 Death is no different whined at than withstood.

Slowly light strengthens, and the room takes shape.
 It stands plain as a wardrobe, what we know,
 Have always known, know that we can't escape,
 Yet can't accept. One side will have to go.
 Meanwhile telephones crouch, getting ready to ring
 In locked-up offices, and all the uncaring
 Intricate rented world begins to rouse.
 The sky is white as clay, with no sun.
 Work has to be done.
 Postmen like doctors go from house to house.







Walking through a dark tunnel, staring at nothing but a white light. “Look behind you.” I turned around and the once dark tunnel was now lit by the cast of the white circular light. As I continue towards the light it begins to take shape of an orb sitting on top of a stand. Almost as if it was being held up. As I reach the end of the tunnel it starts to take shape of a keyhole. My perspective is completely shifted. The once circular shape now has taken the form of an oval. What I thought was a stand has shifted into a staircase. An object that was at one point three dimensional has now become two.

Roden Crater begins with the trip into the San Francisco Volcanic Field. Surrounded by more than 550 vents, Roden Crater is a lone, bi-colored mound resting on the edge of the Painted Desert. Covered by different colored cinder and ash (from its two separate eruptions) the crater becomes this monument for the observation of light, while at the same time standing in solidarity with the reds of the Painted Desert behind it. The scene around Roden Crater is only a preface for the unexpected and unassuming interior of this massive tool for light.

Nick Sohn





Spring Morning

Star and coronal and bell
April underfoot renews,
And the hope of man as well
Flowers among the morning dews.

Now the old come out to look,
Winter past and winter's pains,
How the sky in pool and brook
Glitters on the grassy plains.

Easily the gentle air
Wafts the turning season on;
Things to comfort them are there,
Though 'tis true the best are gone.

Now the scorned unlucky lad
Rousing from his pillow gnawn
Mans his heart and deep and glad
Drinks the valiant air of dawn.

Half the night he longed to die,
Now are sown on hill and plain
Pleasures worth his while to try
Ere he longs to die again.

Blue the sky from east to west
Arches, and the world is wide,
Though the girl he loves the best
Rouses from another's side.



If I imagined two kingdoms bordering each other, one of which I know rather well and the other not at all, and if however much I desired it I was not allowed to enter the unknown kingdom, I would still be able to form some idea of it.

I would go to the border of the kingdom known to me and follow it all the way, and in doing so I would by my movements describe the outline of that unknown land and thus have a general idea of it, although I had never set foot in it.

And if this was a labor that occupied me very much, if I was unflaggingly scrupulous, it presumably would sometimes happen that if I stood with sadness at the border of my kingdom and gazed longingly into that unknown country that was so near and yet so far, I would be granted an occasional disclosure.



The divine comedy of Roden Crater

During the walk up the East Tunnel, I repeatedly encountered something completely unexpected: a sense of humor. It started almost immediately, when I noticed faint concentric circles of light reflecting off ribbed protrusions on the walls. They recalled to my mind—of all things— the classic Disney roller coaster Space Mountain! The ride starts with the cart slowly clicking up the ramp amongst rings of retro-futuristic blinking lights, eventually reaching a peak and then careening down into darkness. Despite not being much for rides as a kid, the sense of anticipation before the drop was my favorite part. Yet, in Turrell’s tunnel, the drop never comes—or at least not in a way I imagined.

As I continued upward, and expectation gave way to meditation, a series of well-worn cultural tropes came to mind. Since I was quite literally approaching a “light at the end of a tunnel,” I considered how this might ultimately be an optimist’s journey, especially as I noticed the white circle in the distance growing larger. At the same time, the notion of “moving towards the light” made me think that I was actually enacting a kind of artificial death. All very familiar notions, yet somehow made strangely humorous precisely because of their opposition and their reification. It was hard to know how long it took to get to the top, but when the ground started to level out, I remember thinking “I can’t believe someone actually built Plato’s cave!”

Steven Weiner



Tanner Chase





all the more I wish to see
in those blossoms at dawn
the face of a god



After the stars had been placed in the sky, First Man and First Woman still wanted to make something that would give strong daylight. They spread six unwounded buckskins on the ground. On them they placed a large, perfect, round turquoise. They marked the great turquoise with a mouth and nose and eyes. They made a streak of yellow below the mouth, across the face. They then placed another layer of six more unwounded buckskins. This became *Johonaa'ei* (the Sun).

The different Beings discussed where they would put the Sun. Some thought it should be placed on the highest mountain, but they finally decided to place it in the sky. The next question was how the Sun should move. Should it move up and down? Should it move in a circle without going down? It was decided that it would pass from east to west to give light all over the world.





Photography Credits

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pages 2-3, 4, 31

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pages 8, 10, 13, 14-15, 18-19, 23, 24, 25-26, 28, 32, 34

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page 20

Colophon

This book was designed and assembled by Nina Miller. It was typeset in Clarendon Text Pro and printed on a Canon Laser printer. It was hand assembled and bound.

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