



Acquainted with the Night

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A prize-winning poet and author of many volumes of poetry as well as several nonfiction books, Christopher Dewdney presents a fascinating tour of the hours between dusk and dawn as he leads the reader on a journey that begins in his Toronto neighborhood and expands outward ultimately to include the universe. In *Acquainted with the Night: Excursions Through the World After Dark* he devotes twelve chapters to examining specific characteristic features of each passing hour of the night, framing these with an introductory and a concluding chapter. His personal and deep appreciation of night as “a planetary spectacle,” “a mysterious, magical realm,” and “a frontier” worthy of continued exploration draws the reader into what promises to be a fascinating, nocturnal adventure.

Functioning much like signposts along the way, Dewdney intersperses within his text quoted excerpts from the works of poets, novelists, philosophers, and scientists to introduce or provide commentary on particular elements of the passing hours. For example, in his second chapter, “The Garden of the Hesperides: Sunset - 6 P.M.,” he relies on an Emily Dickinson poem to set the mood for the beginning of nightfall, with brief descriptions of end-of-the-day activities, and follows with a Henry David Thoreau quotation that allows him to recount memorable sunsets from his travels. As he continues the chapter, Dewdney moves from familiar, personal experience to research-oriented topics such as the physics of sunsets, meteorological considerations, and the findings of astronomers on understanding the progress of evening around the globe.

Subsequent chapters follow this format: personal observation leading to deft forays into cultural history, mythology, scientific knowledge, and/or nature lore. In these chapters he describes, as darkness falls, the stirring of nocturnal animal life, including creatures of the sea; human nightlife, ordinary and celebratory; star study; night terrors; insomnia; and finally the gradual return of day that begins with sunrise and the twittering of birds. Throughout, Dewdney’s method of conducting side trips into relevant supporting materials adds measurably to the reader’s enjoyment.

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