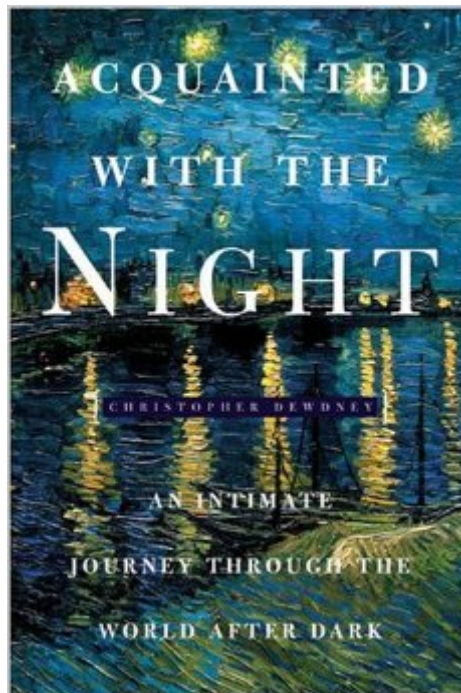


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Acquainted With The Night : Excursions Through The World After Dark



Synopsis

A gorgeously written exploration of the twelve hours of night. We prepare for it each evening, and spend half our lives in its embrace, yet night retains its mysteries. In *Acquainted with the Night*, author Christopher Dewdney takes readers on a fascinating journey through the nocturnal realm. Twelve chapters correspond to the twelve hours of an "ideal" night, starting at 6PM and ending at 6AM, and serve as points of departure for night's central themes: sunsets, nocturnal animals, bedtime stories, festivals of the night, fireworks, nightclubs, astronomy, sleep and dreams, the graveyard shift, ladies of the night, the art of night, and endless nights. With boundless curiosity, a lyrical, intimate tone, and an eye for nighttime beauties both natural and manmade, Dewdney paints a captivating portrait of our hours in darkness.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As a night owl and poetry-lover, I was intrigued by the title alone. Dewdney's writing is gorgeous: at turns it's funny, poignant, and illuminating. It's easy to tell the writer is a poet. At the same time, it's full of fascinating trivia and pieces of knowledge, covering history, physics, literature, astronomy, psychology, and philosophy.

This highly unusual examination of the phases of night will ensure that never again will you be oblivious of them. The author begins with the three stages of twilight---civil twilight, nautical twilight, and astronomical twilight, and ends with first light, the beginning of dawn. In between he takes you

through all the phases humans have assigned to the hours: dinner hour, children's bedtime, fireworks festivals, ghost-walking hours. Then there are the natural ones, such as the hour the nocturnal animals come out, stages of sleep, the best times for astronomical observations. He does this in a poetic and engaging way, for this is no dry recitation of facts. Each hour has its own delights, and he exults in celebrating them and saluting them. My only caveat is that his 'hours' are based on a northern European/American rhythm of the day. For them, "It is 11 pm and a great many people are asleep"---but in Spain they are just sitting down to dinner! It helps to remember the great variety of human behaviors in just about everything. Read this book and fall in love with night!

This has now become my favorite book about the night. I liked this book better than "At Day's Close" by A. Roger Ekirch, which was more of a scholarly examination of a very specific subject: how night was experienced before electric lighting. That book was interesting, but in a dry, factual way.

"Acquainted with the Night" is chock-full of facts, too, but covers a broader range of night-related themes (such as sunsets, constellations, insomnia, dreams, bedtime stories, nightclubs, even a visit to a sleep clinic). The book is divided into 12 chapters - one for each of the 12 hours of the night -- and is written in a very engaging, readable voice. The author is also a poet, which probably accounts for his writing style, and he intersperses night-related snippets of poetry into the book. This book does contain one curious error, however. In the chapter entitled "The Art of Darkness" in which the author describes various famous paintings that depict night, he says about Edward Hopper's "Nighthawks": "Outside, on the sidewalk in front of the windows, an anonymous man walks by, bathed in the green light flooding from the diner." Either Mr. Dewdney has never seen the painting and was repeating an erroneous description he was given or he was looking at a bad reproduction of it. I live in Chicago, where the original "Nighthawks" hangs in the Art Institute of Chicago: There is no man walking by outside the diner in "Nighthawks." All four figures in the painting are inside the diner. I'm surprised that this mistake wasn't caught by the editors, and that no one else seems to have noticed it. In spite of this error about one of my favorite works of art, I can't hold it against Mr. Dewdney when he has also portrayed the various aspects of night so evocatively. It's still worth reading.

The early part of this book was fascinating - the science and culture of night, the mythology and psychology and physiology. I was fascinated by the stages of night and the stages of sleep but toward the end, during the discussion of paintings that were influenced by night, my interest waned. In spite of that, I'd recommend the book for anyone who has walked by night and wondered.

I found this book to be well worth its five star rating. Every chapter taught me about things I didn't know. This book is a wealth of interesting information and I believe after reading this book you'll never look at the night the same way again.

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