

= Acquainted with the Night (book) =

Acquainted with the Night : Excursions through the World After Dark (or Acquainted with the Night : A Celebration of the Dark Hours) is a non @-@ fiction book by Christopher Dewdney about various aspects of night . It was first published in 2004 by HarperCollins . It uses the same title as the Robert Frost poem " Acquainted with the Night " . The book consists of 14 chapters , with one chapter dedicated to each hour of the night , from 6 pm to 5 am . Mini @-@ essays populate each chapter which each follow a theme , like nocturnal creatures , dreams , astronomy , and mythology . Other subjects and topics touched upon include science , art , culture , natural history , superstitions , and psychology . The book was a finalist for the 2004 Governor General 's Awards and for the 2005 Charles Taylor Prize . It tied with Dark Matter : Reading The Bones for the World Fantasy Award in Anthologies .

= = Background = =

At the time of Acquainted with the Night 's writing , author and poet Christopher Dewdney was 52 years old and living in Toronto with his wife , Barbara Gowdy . He had previously written 14 books , the last being the 2002 book of poetry , The Natural History . His previous non @-@ fiction books were Last Flesh : Life in the Transhuman Era (1998) on the impacts of technological advances on humanism , The Secular Grail : Paradigms of Perception (1993) regarding the human psyche , and The Immaculate Perception (1986) on his views of consciousness , language and dreams . Dewdney 's past books were described as being " more admired than read " . On the topic of ' the night ' , he had a lifelong fascination with nightlife and eventually decided to write a book about it . He quickly became overwhelmed by the amount of information relating to the subject . For research , he consulted a variety of genres and formats , including books , journals , magazines , music , and movies , and collected information within the broad topics of art , science , social sciences and history . The perspective Dewdney took was that of " explaining night to beings from another planet that had two opposed suns and no night at all " .

= = Content = =

The content is divided into 14 chapters . The first chapter serves as an introduction and considers the mythological and geological origin of night . The next 12 chapters are each titled after an hour starting with chapter 2 's 6 pm and ending with chapter 13 's 5 am . Chapter 2 discusses the transition into night , including sunsets , the green flash , the stages of twilight , as well as Olbers ' paradox , and a definition of the size and speed of night . The 7 pm chapter deals with nature at night , how animals see and hear differently at night with a focus on bats , nighthawks , and nocturnal insects . The 8 pm chapter analyzes children 's literature and bedtime stories . The 9 pm chapter discusses aspects of the city at night , including the evolution of nightclubs , street lights , and the impacts of light pollution . The 10 pm chapter discusses night festivals around the world and throughout history . The 11 pm chapter explains the circadian rhythm and the physiology of sleep and dreams .

The 12 am chapter traces the history behind dream interpretation from Gilgamesh to Sigmund Freud , Carl Jung , and Calvin Hall . Here , Dewdney considers nightmares and takes sudden unexplained death syndrome , whose sufferers are almost always Asian males , between 20 and 49 years old , as an extreme example of nightmares that cause the dreamer to die from a " ventricular fibrillation ... brought about by extreme terror " . The 1 am chapter compares literary and mythological personifications of , or beings associated with , the night . The 2 am chapter tells the stories of the legends behind the moon and the constellations . The 3 am chapter is all about insomnia . The 4 am chapter provides a geographical aspect , touring the places with long nights , like Las Vegas , caves , the poles , and deep within the oceans . The 5 am chapter discusses artistic representations of night , especially in music , on film and through paintings . The final chapter is a conclusion in which Dewdney reflects on memorable sunrises he has experienced and contrasts

sunrises with sunsets .

= = Style = =

The title shares its name with the Robert Frost poem *Acquainted with the Night* , which is quoted on the first page . The book 's structure uses twelve chapters , equating to twelve hours of night , from 6 pm to 5 am . Two additional chapters , " *First Night* " and " *Night 's Last Stand* " , bookend the twelve chapters as an introduction and conclusion . This hour @-@ by @-@ hour structure was used to move the narrative along logically while jumping between diverse topics . The topics range from such disparate subjects as culture , superstitions , natural history , physiology , and psychology so that reviewers variously called the book " a compendium " , " a browser 's book " and full of " encyclopedic mini @-@ essays " . Autobiographical passages are also included . One reviewer noted the format uses personal observations that lead to discussions of broad subjects with " side trips into relevant supporting materials " .

The reviewer for the *Quill & Quire* cited the book as an example of a subgenre which an article in *The Atlantic Monthly* dubbed " mundane studies " referring to the ubiquity of the subject , like Mark Kurlansky 's *Salt : A World History* and Witold Rybczynski 's *One Good Turn : A Natural History of the Screwdriver and the Screw* . Dewdney 's writing in *Acquainted with the Night* combines a poet 's point of view with an interest for the sciences . The tone was described as " boyish enthusiasm " and " highly condensed yet personable voice " . Gisèle Baxter , in the journal *Canadian Literature* , wrote that the its tone was set at the beginning of the book by " an anecdote of a small boy creeping into the moonlit , partly wooded backyard of his family home " .

= = Publication and reception = =

Acquainted with the Night : Excursions through the World After Dark was published as a hardback in Canada by HarperCollins in May 2004 . In the United States , Bloomsbury published the hardback version in July 2004 as *Acquainted with the Night : A Celebration of the Dark Hours* . The trade paperback version was published by HarperCollins in March 2005 . An excerpt was published in the Canadian literary magazine *Geist* . The book was nominated for the 2005 Charles Taylor Prize , awarded to the best Canadian work of literary non @-@ fiction , and Dewdney was a finalist in the English @-@ language non @-@ fiction category of the Governor General 's Awards . The *Library Journal* noted the book would be " most useful for larger public libraries " .

Regarding Dewdney 's writing , the reviewer for *Publishers Weekly* wrote that Dewdney writes carefully and " confidently " . Another reviewer called the book " engaging and recreational " . Gisèle Baxter , in *Canadian Literature* , found his use of language " provok [es] consideration through its elegant turns of phrase and image " and Laura Wright , in *Discover* called the imagery " arresting " . In *The Globe and Mail* , poet and novelist Margaret Atwood wrote , " The prose moves from the strictly informative to the lyrical to the charming to the amusing to the odd to the strangely moving without batting an eye . " Another reviewer noted Dewdney " combined a deft lyric touch with a deep interest in science " . The reviewer for *Canadian Geographic* wrote that " the strength of the book is in its artful mix of science and poetry " . Literary critic Sven Birkerts found Dewdney to be " an engaging enough narrator and solid , enthusiastic stylist " . The book 's structure received mixed reviews , some reviewers found Dewdney was able to effectively transition between various topics while other reviewers did not . Birkerts wrote the book has " a fun @-@ facts @-@ fished @-@ from @-@ the @-@ data @-@ ocean ... [and] end @-@ of @-@ term crammer " sense to it . The *Quill & Quire* and *The Economist* reviewers found the topics were too cursory , like " an encyclopedia entry " . Birkerts concluded " that any one of Dewdney 's excursions could earn its keep as a column in a popular science magazine " but assembled into one book the topics seemed random .