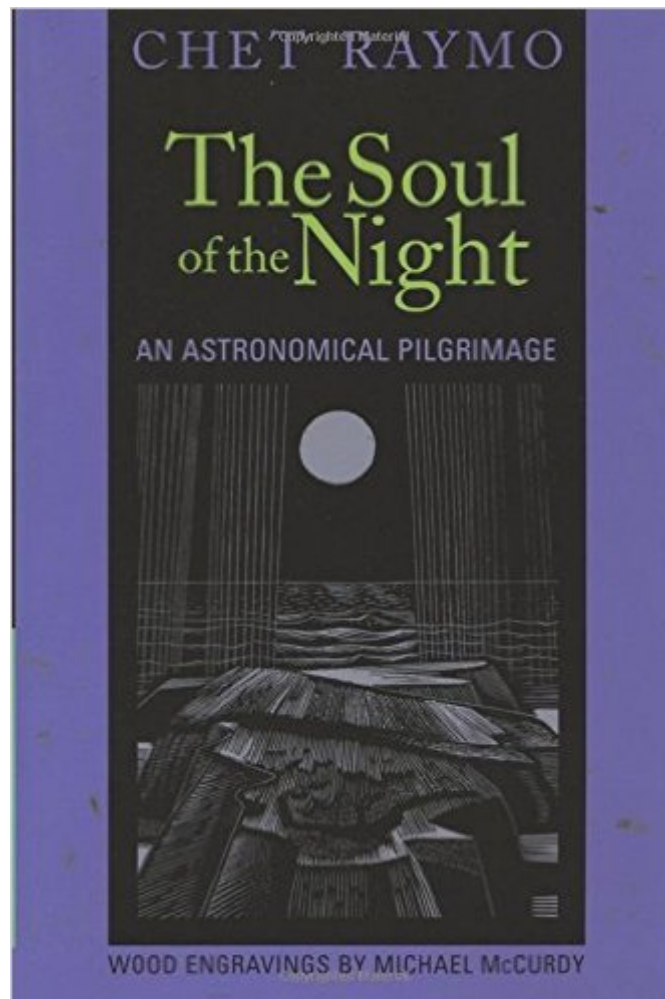


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Soul Of The Night: An Astronomical Pilgrimage



Synopsis

Originally published two decades ago, *The Soul of the Night* is a classic work that is a must for those interested in the relationship between science and faith.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book requires a certain level of knowledge. Knowledge about astronomy, e.g. star constellations and star names, about chemistry, e.g. atomic structures, and about biology. Furthermore, a spiritual sense for nature and existence combined with a questioning but open mind should be part of the reader's characteristics. If you have all this, you will love to explore this book, just like me. You will find questions you are asking yourself, too, as well as new hints and new perspectives to look at "things" written in an almost poetic language. And, that's the best, you learn. Even though theories about quarks or the beginning of the universe and our existence are hard to understand, you will get an idea about it all with this book. Theory is presented in an easy to read way and written in a wonderful descriptive language using parables and comparisons to create pictures in your mind. I am already halfway through and I do not want this book to end. It is going to be one of my very favorite books.

In *THE SOUL OF THE NIGHT*, a collection of tender, lyrical essays praising the night sky, astronomer, physicist and college professor Chet Raymo teaches by example that science and passion are intimately, irrepressibly connected; they're meant for each other. Through his eyes and

pen, Raymo draws breathtaking pictures of our universe and connects them to mythology, literature, religion, history and anthropology. He calls on Roethke, Rilke, Shelley, Thoreau, Buddha, the Bible and the Koran, among others, to inspire his instructive reveries. He compares the night sky to Moby Dick, a butterfly's chrysalis to stardust, and the Earth's cone-shaped shadow in outer space to a wizard's cap "8000 miles wide in diameter at the rim, where it fits snugly on the Earth's brow." And when the sun and moon come together in eclipse, he transforms the view into a gentle kiss between lovers. Now THIS is the way to learn astronomy. Raymo deserves to be savored slowly, by candlelight.

A remarkable book written by a remarkable man. Not often have I come across a book that speaks of an utter enchantment with the stars, and so accurately tells of the grace inherent in them. I, too, am an astronomer, and am often at a loss for words for a description of the beauty that I try to relate to friends and, indeed, to myself. Chet Raymo's work is pure poetry, containing the symmetry of a love-affair with science and the acknowledgement of the unknown. From "Snakes and Ladders" to "The Blandishments of Color", he guides you through the convoluted terrain of the night sky. Delirious with his sublime prose, I can only finish by saying this- Read This Book. It ought to be required reading for every survey class in astronomy, and will be well-loved by anyone enthralled by the stars.

I read this book for a college course on Ecocriticism and was totally spellbound. I read it in one sitting and it made me crave for that feeling you get while standing under the stars--realizing how small you are--and how infinitely wonderful at the same time. Everybody should read this book, it is beautiful and important for understanding humankind's place within nature.

Allow me to start with a personal anecdote. At age 44, I still remember vividly taking a sort of "preference" test in junior high school ... you probably know the sort, a series of questions with two answers to choose from ... stuff like: Would you rather kick an annoying poodle or eat an Italian dinner? I scored so low on the on the questions skewed to "science" that there wasn't even a place for me on the graph! About seven years ago, I picked up an earlier edition of "Soul Of The Night" in a used bookstore on a friend's recommendation. Finally, a couple years ago, I got around to reading it. Inside I found descriptions, ways of seeing that I could have never managed on my own. Although it's not a religious book, I (as a Christian) found myself inspired and challenged and not a little awestruck by Raymo's writing. If you are not so inclined, don't let my mention of this dissuade you ...

I would not wish to do a disservice to Raymo or the book in that way. Pleasures abound here and for a decidedly non-science/astronomy reader, I was ushered through a door I never thought I'd find. Raymo's style is so friendly that I can also apply to him what I have used to describe Jimmy Webb's amazing book on songwriting ("Tunesmith") ... the only thing that's missing from the book is the author's physical presence and the beer!

"The Soul of the Night" reads like poetry as the author describes moonlight caught on moving water, his coming upon a flower of an unexpected color in the woods, the movement of the earth through space in the time it takes a child to fall. He also makes the mundane periodic table sound poetic: "Standoffish helium. Spooky boron. No-nonsense carbon." He can quote Wallace Stevens and Sylvia Plath and still find time to discuss black holes, comets and red shifts of galaxies. It is a joyful, dreaming celebration of the universe.

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