

The stars: what are they?

They are chunks of ice reflecting the sun;

they are lights afloat on the waters beyond the transparent dome;

they are nails nailed to the sky;

they are holes in the great curtain between us and the sea of light;

they are holes in the hard shell that protects us from the inferno beyond;

they are the daughters of the sun;

they are the messengers of the gods;

they are shaped like wheels and are condensations of air with flames

roaring through the spaces between the spokes;

they sit in little chairs;

they are strewn across the sky;

they run errands for lovers;

they are composed of atoms that fall through the void and entangle with
one another;

they are the souls of dead babies turned into flowers in the sky;

they are birds whose feathers are on fire;

they impregnate the mothers of great men;

they are the shining concentrations of spirit-breath, made from the

residues left over from the creation of the sun and moon;

they portend war, death, famine, plague, good and bad harvests,

the birth of kings;

they regulate the prices of salt and fish;

they are the seeds of all the creatures on earth;

they are the flock of the moon, scattered across the sky like sheep in a

meadow, and she leads them to pasture;

they are spheres of crystal and their movement creates a music in the sky;

they are fixed and we are moving;

we are fixed and they are moving;

they are the seal-hunters who have lost their way;

they are the footprints of Vishnu, striding across the sky;

they are the lights of the palaces where the spirits live;
they are of different sizes;
they are funeral candles, and to dream of them is to dream of death;
they are, like all matter, made of four kinds of matter:
protons, neutrons, electrons, neutrinos;
they are all the same size but some are closer to us;
they interact through four forces: gravity,
electromagnetism, the strong and weak nuclear forces;
they are the only gods and the sun is the chief among them;
they are the ostrich hunters, out all night, and
at dawn they huddle near the sun to get
warm, which is why you cannot see them;
dew and frost fall from the stars;
winds, warm and cold, come from the stars;
stars fall from heaven into a maiden's lap;
they are the embers of the fire of creation;
they never change;
they are the white tents where the
Star People live;
they are the countless eyes of Varuna, who rides across the sky on
Makara, who is half bird and half crocodile, or half antelope and
half fish;
they are in a state of constant flux;
sacrifices must be made to them to bring rain;
they are the Never Vanishing, in the form of swallows feeding on
the fruit of the Tree of Immortality that grows on the island in
the Lake of the Green Falcon;
they glisten, twinkle, sparkle, flash;
they are delightful;
they are portents of evil;
they are the eyes of Thjasse flung into the sky by Thor;

they are the white ants in the anthill built around the motionless Dhurva,
who meditates for eternity deep in the forest;

they are a kind of celestial cheese churned into light;
they are, they simply are;

the stars are an enormous garden, and if we do not live
long enough to witness their germination, blooming,
foliage, fecundity, fading, withering, and corruption,
there are so many specimens that every stage is
before our view;

we and all the stars we see are just one atom in an infinite ensemble:
a cosmic archipelago;

the sky is like a millstone turning, with the stars like ants
walking on it in the opposite direction;

the sky is like the canopy of a carriage, with the
stars strung like beads across it;

the sky is a solid orb and the stars the perpetual illumination
of the volcanoes upon it;

the sky is solid lapis lazuli, flecked with pyrite,
which are the stars;

each star has a name and a secret name;

the only word we hear from them is their light;

men will never compass in their conceptions the whole of the stars;

under a starry sky on a clear night, the hidden power
of knowing speaks a language with no name;

goodness and love flow down from them;

if we were not located in a galaxy we would see no stars at all;

if gravity were not so weak, the stars would be smaller,
and if the stars were smaller they wouldn't burn for
very long, and if they didn't burn for very long we
wouldn't be here;

they have no chance or random element, no erratic or pointless movement;

evil and misfortune flow down from them;
their existence is improbable;

their infinitude propels us to count them;
their wondrous regularity is beyond belief and proof of the divine
intelligence that resides within them;

the eternal silence of those infinite spaces is frightening;
the more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also
seems pointless;

all stars move and shine in order to be
most fully what they are — light
gives light because it is its nature;
acquaintance with the stars is essential to an understanding of the poets;
if the stars did not radiate light they would explode;

souls after death inhabit the stars — the blaze of a new
star might therefore indicate that the soul of a great
man, or woman, had reached its destination;

“disaster” connotes “astrally unfortunate”;

the only explanation why there are so many stars we cannot see
is that the Lord created them for other creatures, farther out,
to admire at a nearer distance;

we are the center of the material universe but at the perimeter of the
spiritual universe and we are doomed to watch the spectacle of the
celestial dance from afar;

unlike the other animals, man was made to stand erect
so that he could gaze at the stars;

King Arthur is up there, waiting for his return to rule England again;

K'uei is there, the brilliant scholar born with a hideous face;

up there is the Manger, the Mist, the Little Cloud, the Beehive;

look: the Tower of Babel and the Felicity of Tents;

up there are highway robbers, and doves bringing

ambrosia to the gods, and the twin horsemen of the dawn;

up there the daughter of the wind, mourning for her husband lost at sea;

the Strong River is there, and the Palace of the Five

Emperors, the Kennel of the Barking Dogs, the Straw

Road, the Birds' Way, the Snake River of Sparkling Dust;

up there are the nymphs who mourn their brother Hyas, killed by a
wild boar, and whose tears are shooting stars;

there are the Seven Portuguese Towers, the Boiling Sea,

the Place Where One Bows Down;

look: the Ostriches Leaving and the Ostriches Returning and the Two
Ostriches who are friends;

Cassiopeia, Queen of Ethiopia, who thought she was

more beautiful than the Nereids, is there, and her

hapless daughter Andromeda, and Perseus who

rescued her with the head of Medusa swinging from

his belt, and the monster Cetus he slew, and the

winged horse Pegasus he rode;

there is the bull who plows the Furrow of Heaven;

up there is the Hand Stained with Henna, the

Lake of Fullness, the Empty Bridge, the

Egyptian X;

and once there was a girl who married a bear and her father and brothers
were so horrified they killed the bear and then she herself turned into a
bear and killed her parents and chased her brothers over the mountains
and through the streams and cornered them in a tree until the youngest
aimed his magic bow high and each brother held on to an arrow and was
shot into the sky and turned into a star up there;

up there is the Butcher's Shop, the Easy Chair,

the Broken Platter, the Rotten Melon, the Light

of Heaven;

Hans the Wagoner, who gave Jesus a ride, is there, and the lion who
fell from the moon in the form of a meteor;

up there, once a year, ten thousand magpies form a bridge so that the
Weaving Girl can cross the River of Light to meet the Cowherd Boy;
there are the braids of Queen Berenice,
who sacrificed her hair to assure her husband's safety;
up there is a ship that never reaches safe harbor,
and the Whisperer, the Weeping One,
the Illuminator of the Great City, and look:
the General of the Wind;
the Emperor Mu Wang and his charioteer Tsao Fu, who went in search
of the peaches of the Western Paradise, are there;
the beautiful Callisto, doomed by Juno's jealousy, and the goddess
Marichi who drives her chariot led by wild boars through the sky;
there are the Sea Goat, the Danish Elephant, the Long Blue
Cloud-Eating Shark, and the White-Bone-Snake;
up there is Theodosius turned into a star and the head of John the Baptist
turned into a star and Li Po's breath, a star his poems make brighter;
there are the Two Gates, one through which the souls
descend when they are ready to enter human bodies,
and the other through which they rise at death;
there a puma springs on its prey, and a
Yellow Dragon climbs the Steps of Heaven;
up there is the Literary Woman, the Frigid Maiden, the Moist Daughters,
and the Head of the Woman in Chains;
there is the Thirsty Camel, the Camel Striving to Get to Pasture,
and the Camel Pasturing Freely;
there the Crown of Thorns or the crown that Bacchus
gave Ariadne as a wedding gift;
look: the Horse's Navel, the Lion's Liver, the Balls of the Bear;
there is Rohni, the Red Deer, so beautiful
that the moon, though he had twenty-seven
wives, loved her alone;

up there the Announcer of Invasion on the Border,

the Child of the Waters,

the Pile of Bricks,

the Exaltation of Piled-Up Corpses,

the Excessively Minute,

the Dry Lake,

the Sacks of Coals,

the Three Guardians of the Heir Apparent,

the Tower of Wonders,

the Overturned Chair;

up there is a cloud of dust kicked up by a buffalo, and the steamy breath of
the elephant that lies in the waters that surround the earth, and the muddy
water churned by a turtle swimming across the sky;

up there is the broken circle that is a chipped
dish, or a boomerang, or the opening of the
cave where the Great Bear sleeps;

up there the two donkeys whose braying made such a racket they
frightened away the giants and were rewarded with a place in the sky;

there is the Star of a Thousand Colors, the Hand of
Justice, the Plain and Even Way;

there is the Double Double;

there the Roadside Inn;

there the State Umbrella;

there the Shepherd's Hut, there the Vulture;

look: the Winnowing Fan;

there the Growing Small;

there the Court of God;

there the Quail's Fire;

there St. Peter's Ship and the Star of the Sea;

there: look: up there: the stars.