

midst of natural aspects, and under the influence of natural phenomena. His question from the earliest time has been, not only what these things of nature are, and what physical impression they make on him, but also, what they mean, what is their purpose. The latter question is at its root a religious one, for it presupposes an unseen power behind natural aspects and phenomena.

Ruskin says that a mark of the modern mind is its faithlessness, by which he means a want of belief in the unseen. Early poets can never be accused of faithlessness in that sense, for their imagination peopled all natural objects, the tree, the river, the ocean, the cloud, with unseen beings who controlled the natural forces belonging to these objects. Certain aspects of nature gave delight to men in early times as they do now—the warm sun, bright skies, genial airs, pleasant landscapes. Other aspects, which to us seem harmless and even delightful, were in early times objects of dread—such as mountains, moors, forests, storms, winter and darkness. The references in English poetry to night-time illustrate this change. An English poet of the seventh or eighth century gives this characteristic impression:

When men the sun's light no longer  
might see  
When the obscuring darkness fell  
over all.  
Shapes of darkness then would come  
striding  
Wan under the welkin.

Chaucer, writing in the fourteenth century thus describes night:

Night with his mantel, that is derke  
and rude,

Gan over spide the Hemispirie  
aboute.

Spencer, in the sixteenth century, expresses the same dislike of darkness:

Tho, when as cheerless night ycovered  
had

Fair heaven with an universal  
cloud,

That every wight dismayed with  
darkness sad,

In silence and in sleep themselves  
did shroud.

If the night has still something of a spooky effect on us moderns, it is ethics, because we were taught, as children, to be afraid of the dark, by nurse maids or other foolish persons, or because we possess an instinctive feeling about it inherited from remote ancestors. But Byron wrote with perfect sincerity of a certain night during a thunder-storm in the Alps—a combination of aspects, night, storm and mountains—that would probably have made Chaucer's flesh creep and his hair stand on end:

And this is in the night; most glorious  
night!

Thou wert not meant for slumber;  
let me be

A sharer in thy fierce and far delight,  
A portion of the tempest and of  
thee.

And Meredith:

Night on the rolling foliage fell;  
But I, who love old hymning night.

Contrasted with this early dread of the dark was the delight felt in good things of day.

Chaucer's Simile:  
As fresh as is the bright somer's day.