



astronomy-themed poetry from Janet Kuypers
performed 11/14/19 as the finalé feature
at the Texas Night Sky Festival

Night Sky

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Where We've Been and What We've Seen

I have journeyed around the world with you
after all I've seen, I'm now an observer —
an astronomer looking out into the universe
out past the solar system, past the Kuiper Belt
trying to understand what makes everything
everything

I fly in airplanes, I jump from airplanes,
I pilot airplanes, getting closer to the stars

molecule by molecule,
we originate from stars
and we are all linked,
our bodies formed from stardust

but outer space is a violent place
violent explosions create the stars
and our earth has earthquakes, avalanches,
volcanoes, el Niños, tornadoes, tsunamis, typhoons

and in all this madness
somehow I found you

(continued)

with you I have watched solar storms
from the Arctic Circle's Aurora Borealis
we've even seen it dance over Greenland
from our window, 40,000 feet in the sky

I've seen galaxies collide
I've seen comets smash into planets
I've seen supernovae and the death of stars
and in all of that, I still found you

as I said before, I'm only an observer
but I've found what I've been looking for

and with these observations,
I thee wed

and I'll tighten my grip on your hand
when we travel into the night together

Moonlight

moonlight is a hypnotist
putting people in a trance
whenever you look at it
it takes over your soul
no one can stop it
but no one wants to

Earthrise

It's a pretty daunting task,
landing man on the Moon,
so first things first, NASA
had to *map* the Moon, fast,
so they'd know where to land.

So we launched Lunar Orbiter 1,
to *orbit* and photograph it...
The orbiter had a full photo lab
on it, that not only took photos
but *also* developed *film, in space*.

Housing huge 70 mm film reels,
it clicked pics in zero gravity.
But *then* NASA pointed the camera
at Earth, as an afterthought,
to see first Earthrise on film.

We raced the Soviet Union for space.
But the Earthrise showed the word
that we're all on this tiny blue ball,
and with *this* view, all of our
problems seem far too small.

(from) From Orpheus to Nuking the Moon

NASA's Artist-in-Residence Laurie Anderson
learned from scientists at NASA
that during the cold war
they considered setting off nuclear bombs
on the dark side of the moon

because, you see,
no one *sees* that side of the moon...

but astronomers now estimate
that because of gravity's change
the moon
every year
is over an inch and a half farther away from the earth

so if you remember the moon
looking so big
when you looked at it in the night sky
when you were younger
well,
you may have been right

Orion (2019 edit)

Winter evenings I would look for you.
Dancing along the horizon. You were
always fighting; the great bear to the
north, the bull in the winter.

You were my favorite. whenever I
could I would look for you: out my
window, in my driveway. I remember
a nebula lived in the center of your sword.

You, spending millennia fighting. You
have taught me well. The other night, I
looked out my window again; you were
there, maybe receiving strength from me,

as I did so many years in you.

Envision It in the Night Sky

it occurred to me
that when you see these stars
in constellations in the night sky,
those stars aren't right next to each other...

the closest star to our own
is one hundred light years away
I mean, there's an entire nebula
representing one of the stars
in the sword of Orion.

If you moved away from our planet,
the whole concept of constellations
as we know it
would be lost:
nothing in the Universe
would appear as we envision it
in the night sky.

(from) Universe... Now In Color

Images we see from Hubble,
mind-boggling colors from galaxy clusters and nebulas —
these images come in all digital
a series of ones, a series of zeros
and there's no color in the images at all

Astronauts describe outer space
as an amazingly vast black void

so when people get the data from these images
they imagine the heat radiating from these objects
and they think about what colors work for the images

I know these images in outer space are beautiful
but I didn't know that they were *literally* an art form

Hubble takes pictures of objects in space
with different filters to capture light rays
the human eye can't even see
so when we get final full color images from Hubble
they are nothing like what the Universe really is

so maybe outer space and astronomy
really is
abstract art

(from) Queen of the Night Sky

Because what did we think during the Renaissance when we saw the flash of a new star, Tycho's Supernova in the constellation throne of queen Cassiopeia? Queen Elizabeth asked astrologers to make sense of it, and China's Ming dynasty warned of this evil omen, brighter than Venus or Jupiter in the night sky, and more earth-shattering than William Shakespeare, who shared the same simple scrap of youthful time.

Anyone from Edgar Allan Poe to James Joyce can wax poetic about supernovae, while we search for chances to see the "last hurrah" of now dying massive stars. When a giant star runs out of fuel, gravity wins over and pulls the star in, while the outside...

explodes in the largest explosion the human eye has *ever* seen. The beauty of what is left behind is a nebula, like the one in Orion's sword, that Hubble photographs, tempting the artist's eye with science. So, look up at the night sky every once in a while, for who knows what you'll see. These rare supernovae have helped us discover measurements of distance in space, and they give us reasons to fall in love with astronomy all over again.

(from) Travel Through Space

I love astronomy
but I don't think I'll actually
go
into outer space...

But maybe
I *have*.

All radio and tv signals
are shot out into space,
they continue past our earth
to the ends of the Universe

I've been on multiple radio shows
across the United States —
and I've been interviewed,
read poetry, and even *danced* on tv.

I wonder how far my voice has traveled
into outer space by now.
What stars have seen my poetry by now.
I wonder if anything out there
can decode our signals
and understand what we're trying to tell them.

(from) Quest Beyond an Icy Tail

I needed to discover more
I needed to start my quest

I will search through the sky,
find a new comet, get lost

in the icy tail that strikes
at me with such beauty

for astronomy helps me see
what I am truly meant to be

because even, historically
the planet Venus meant beauty

and that is what I want
people to remember about me

astronomy is beautiful, right
down to those craters on Venus

and, even if no human could
ever touch or walk on these,

the knowledge, the understanding
is beautiful — and all we need

Cover image of a shadow
of a dark rift, NASA, 2012

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