



Night Passages: Philosophy, Literature, and Film

Elisabeth Bronfen

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In the beginning was the night. All light, shapes, language, and subjective consciousness, as well as the world and art depicting them, emerged from this formless chaos. In fantasy, we seek to return to this original darkness. Particularly in literature, visual representations, and film, the night resiliently resurfaces from the margins of the knowable, acting as a stage and state of mind in which exceptional perceptions, discoveries, and decisions play out.

Elisabeth Bronfen follows nocturnal spaces in which extraordinary events unfold, enabling the irrational exploration of desire, transformation, ecstasy, transgression, spiritual illumination, and moral choice. She begins with classical myths depicting the creation of the world and moves through nocturnal scenes in Shakespeare and Milton, Gothic figurations, Hegel's romantic philosophy, and Freud's psychoanalysis. In modern times, she shows how literature and film, particularly film noir, transmit that piece of night the modern subject carries within. From Mozart's "Queen of the Night" to Virginia Woolf's oscillation between day and night, life and death, and chaos and aesthetic form, Bronfen renders something visible, conceivable, and tellable from the dark realms of the unknown.

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