

Notes *in* Double Dawn

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Two *dawns for* the price of one this day.

The cosmic bargain has brought me clambering from bed early. At first kindle of daybreak I am atop the eastern rim of our valley beside Puget Sound, scouting the viewpoints at Carol's campus. And in minutes am shivering like a sentry who has had to walk the high ground all night. The eclipse, rare magical blot of moon precisely across sun, is to occur above the horizon southeast from here. People are reported flocking to the

Columbia River and the high passes of Montana and Idaho to skywatch from within the swath of totality.

Among the college's terraces of walkways, I finally find and settle to the most direct southeastward parapet. The sky: impassive gray. I like it that the veil of cloud will add second mystery to the eclipse, the kiss of sun and moon will take place beyond our range and yet somehow invisibly pull light up out of our eyes. Like owls, we will be made to go more simsighted as the day rises.

One hundred and seventeen winters ago, James Gilchrist Swan, the westmost pioneer whose diaries I am exploring this

winter, stepped into a December night at the continent's verriest edge--Cape Flattery--to spectate the reverse of this eclipse, an enshadowing of the moon. "There was a large party gathered that evening of a chief who was giving a feast. I had informed some of the Indians during the day that there would be an eclipse that evening, but they paid no regard to what I said, and kept on with their feasting and dancing till nearly ten oclock, at which time the eclipse had commenced."

So far this morning, only the birds have commenced, the *weet weet weet weet* of sparrows blithely insistent in tree and bush. Yet the day in some way does seem stalled, slipping cogs. At 7:18, an

exact hour before the eclipse is due and some twenty minutes beyond sunrise, the morning remains wan enough that the breast of a seagull atop a light pole shines out white as a pearl on mud.

A third of an hour more and Carol joins me, having sent her class out to write about the double-yolked dawn. We sip coffee from paper cups and wait for the day's half-light to swoop away.

Swan cherished the sorcery of foretelling--of harkening to an almanac calendar--while the Makay tribe of Cape Flattery preferred to employ the logic of the moment for their divinations. "The moon they believe is composed of a jelly-like substance, such as fishes eat....They think that eclipses are occasioned by a

fish like the 'cultus' cod, which attempts to eat the sun or moon, and which they strive to drive away by shouting, firing guns, and pounding with sticks upon the tops of their houses."

Minutes before eight, a helicopter buzzes across the southeast, a blacker bug now than in its pass a half hour ago.

Swan was rubbernecking interestedly up at the vanishing moon when the fact of the eclipse began to terrify the Makahs.

"Some of them coming out of the lodge at the time, observed it and set up a howl, which soon called out the rest....They told me that the cultus cod were eating the moon, and if we did not drive

them away they would eat it all up, and we should have no more....”

Minutes past eight, a breeze restlessly tosses the dim colors atop the campus flagpole. The loophole beneath the clouds to a few bottom slopes of the Cascade Mountains is losing light. Students began to shoal in front of all the campus buildings. One calls across to another, “Why you wanna watch it get dark? Does it every day.”

Swan eyeing the Makahs: “As the moon became more and more obscure, they increased their clamor, and finally, when totally obscured, they were in great excitement and fear....There

was a most infernal din, and to help it out Jones and myself got out the swivel gun and fired it off....”

By 8:14, the sparrows nearest our parapet are scrunching as far back into the middle of a tree as they can get, and muttering an apprehensive *t-t-t-t*.

In the next minute, a flight of them whirls high overhead, flinging themselves over the forested fringe of the campus and evidently back to their night's refuge.

A minute again, and the college's automatic pole-lights flick on, like blue-white flares struck against the emergency dimness. The clouds go a deeper, more glowering gray.

At 8:18 a.m., totality, it is deepest evening.

Swan with his gunfire chased the eclipse from the Makahs' moon. "The noise, which was so much louder than any they could make, seemed to appease them, and as we shortly saw the silvery edge of the moon make its appearance after its obscuration, they were convinced that the swivel gun had drive off the cultus cod before they had swallowed the last mouthful."

Within three minutes, we stand in a quickening dawn. The birds pick up their day again. At 8:30, on the stroke, the campus's sensor lamps drowse out, in reverence of the day's second birth of light.