LIGHTWRITING
HENRY DAVID THOREAU, NIGHT AND MOONLIGHT, 1863

I shall be a benefactor if I conquer some realms from the night...if I can show men that there is some beauty awake while they are asleep, -- if I add to the domains of poetry.

Deleted: This is a story a young girl gathers in a car during the early hours of the morning. She listens and asks questions as the vehicle travels through the darkness. Outside, the countryside is unbetrayed. The man who is driving could say, "In that field is a castle," and it would be possible for her to believe him.

Michael Ondaatje, In the Skin of a Lion, 1987
JUN’ICHIRO TANAZAKI, IN PRAISE OF SHADOWS, 1933

I have written all this because I have thought that there might still be somewhere, possibly in literature or the arts, where something could be saved. I would call back at least for literature this world of shadows we are losing.

Deleted: After a trip to the Warnjiya restaurant in Kyoto, where he observed that candlelight had been replaced by electricity, Tanazaki concluded, “that only in dim half-light is the true beauty of Japanese lacquerware revealed... darkness is an indispensable element of the beauty of lacquerware.” He suggests that the culinary arts in Japan depend on shadows and are inseparable from darkness. “A brightly lighted room and shining tableware cut the appetite in half.”
“Nobody who has not taken one can imagine the beauty of a walk through Rome by full moon. All details are swallowed up by the huge masses of light and shadow, and only the biggest and most general outlines are visible.”

*Italian Journey. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. 1816*
“I cannot walk through the suburbs in the solitude of the night without thinking that the night pleases us because it suppresses idle details, just as our memory does...”

Jorge Luis Borges, “A New Refutation of Time” in Labyrinths
Thomas Cooper Gotch, *The Lantern Parade*, 1910, oil on canvas

Study for the Birthday Party, about 1930, oil on canvas
night view of the matsuchiyama and sam’ya canal, no.34, utagawa hiroshige, 1857
stills from the third man, carol reed, 1949
Los Angeles California, 1908 (left) 1988 (right)
“I defy the most daring of our artists to suspend the sun or the moon in the middle of his composition...I defy him to give us a sky like nature’s, sprinkled with glittering stars as it might be on the clearest night.”

Denis Diderot
etienne-louis boulee, newton’s cenotaph, 1780-93
I was in the country, on the edge of a wood in the moonlight. My shadow produced by the light caught my eye (it was certainly nothing new to me). Because of my particular mood, the image seemed to me of an extreme melancholy. The shadows of the trees etched on the ground made a most profound impression on me. My imagination exaggerated the scene, and thus I had a glimpse of all that is most somber in nature. What did I see there? The mass of objects stood out in black against the extreme wanness of the light. Nature offered itself to my gaze in mourning. I was struck by the sensations I was experiencing and immediately began to wonder how to apply this, especially to architecture. I tried to find a composition made up of the effect of shadows. To achieve this, I imagined the light (as I had observed it in nature) giving back to me all that my imagination could think of. That was how I proceeded when I was seeking to discover this new type of architecture.
constructing night. apache scouts listening, frederic remington, 1908
the supper at emmaus, rembrandt, 1629
There the moonbeams came trembling in, and fell down upon the deserted pews, and extended along the quiet aisles. A fainter, yet more awful radiance, was hovering round the pulpit, and one solitary ray had dared to rest upon the opened page of the great Bible. Had Nature, in that deep hour, become a worshipper in the house, which man had builded? Or was that heavenly light the visible sanctity of the place, visible because no earthly and impure feet were within the walls?
I rejoice that there are owls. Let them do the idiotic and maniacal hooting for men. It is a sound admirably suited to swamps and twilight woods which no day illustrates, suggesting a vast and undeveloped nature which men have not recognized. They represent the stark twilight and unsatisfied thoughts which all have. All day the sun has shone on the surface of some savage swamp, but now a more dismal and fitting day dawns, and a different race of creatures awakes to express the meaning of Nature there.

The earth is every day overspread with the veil of night for the same reason as the cages of birds are darkened, namely, that we may the more readily apprehend the higher harmonies of thought in the hush and quiet of darkness. Thoughts which day turns into smoke and mist stand about us in the night as light and flames...