



CHASING THE SKY

**A collection of poems
from the 2024 Poetry Festival**

cranbornechase.org.uk





CHASING THE SKY

Chasing the Sky celebrates all things celestial, from bees and flying insects, through to birds, clouds, the winds, and the stars and planets surrounding planet Earth. Chasing the Sky was co-ordinated by Chase & Chalke's community poet Akulah Agbami of the Womens' Community Forum. Her workshops with 730 children from eight local schools were followed by a one-day Poetry Festival in Shaftesbury.

This volume of poetry comprises works created by eight poets who worked together on a clear day in September 2024 starting before dawn at Win Green, the highest point in Cranborne Chase National Landscape. This activity was guided by Steve Tonkin, Cranborne Chase National Landscape's Dark Sky Advisor. The poets took part in a whole day of workshops and sharing sessions, finishing back at Win Green after sunset.

Schools involved in the project: Pamphill Primary School, Motcombe Primary School, St Mary's Primary Gillingham, Shaftesbury Abbey Primary, Shaftesbury Primary School, Witchampton Primary, Wyke School, Gillingham, and Seeds for Success youth alternative educational provision.

The copyright remains with the writers.

Chasing the Sky was funded through Chase & Chalke's Communities Caring for Heritage Grant Scheme, one of 20 projects celebrating the natural, cultural and historic landscapes of Cranborne Chase and supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.



Scan to find out more about Chase & Chalke and its projects.



Cranborne Chase National Landscape became the 14th International Dark Sky Reserve in 2019, the only National Landscape to receive this designation in its entirety. The 50% of our environment that is above the horizon is as valuable as the beautiful chalk downlands and dramatic escarpments below it. We know that protecting the darkness of the star-studded skies above us also help to protect the precious nocturnal habitats on Earth's surface.



Scan to find out more about the International Dark Sky Reserve.



THE WRITERS

Eight of the writers involved in Chasing the Sky have generously shared their work with us.

Akulah Agbami

Akulah is a prizewinning poet, playwright and producer, director of Black Artists on the Move and trustee of the Womens' Community Forum. She was Poet in Residence with Chase & Chalke, inspiring over a thousand people to write and connect with the landscape, heritage and culture of Cranborne Chase National Landscape.

Maya Chowdhry

Maya is a multidisciplinary artist creating immersive and dramatic experiences for audiences and participants, leaning into her past work in radio, audiowalks and live art.

Julia Desch

Julia is a multifaceted artist, using words and visual art experimentation. Located on the Dorset/Wiltshire border, Julia records for This is Alfred local radio station and writes poetry for the Donhead Digest, and also belongs to the Shaftesbury Writers' Group.

Neala Luna Bhagwansingh

Neala is a writer and founder of the Write Club, a peer-review group dedicated to supporting and empowering fellow writers.



Ronnie McGrath

Ronnie is a Black, socially conscious, neo-surrealist writer, poet and visual artist. His lectureships in creative writing include London College of Communication, Imperial College London and Bath Spa University. As a community artist, Ronnie uses creative writing as a therapeutic tool to work with members of the unhoused community, and people who suffer from chronic pain, anxiety and poor mental health.

Paul Osborne

Paul is a writer, artist and volunteer on many projects with Chase & Chalke supporting projects, leading walks and enjoying forest bathing.

Annie Philpott

Would-be writer, community radio reporter and local councillor, in her day job Annie is a public health professional. She is the surprised winner of the Chase & Chalke Open Writing Competition 2023 and The Shaftesbury Tales Short Story Writing Competition 2024.

Geeta Roopnarine

Geeta is a writer and visual artist who works at the intersection of art, science and technology. Her history includes Indian, Trinidadian and Greek cultures and she draws upon the images, myths and philosophy of these backgrounds in her work. She has taken part in art exhibitions in Greece, London and New York. She was born in Trinidad and Tobago and lives in Athens.






Akulah Agbami

Sky Poems - 1

the stars lurch the wood against
my spine and all at sea the unforgotten
lavender the sweet remembered dogrose
the greedy sweetpea

lurch the slow thwack of wave to
wood and my eyes slit and slant
and flicker understood the mantled
milky way the ravenous moon
that sinks its teeth horizonward
and I am your cocoon

the stars girth and I'm Medusa's neck
my stare has run its course
no more storied men to paralyze to
check I lollop with the water's lisp
and Pegasus lifts daintily this
shrinking snippet of earth and sea
the stars spine the outbreath of
the wretched sky the unforgiven
lavender the fast devoured hibiscus
given up in colour to the sunlight the
frolics of the teetering admonishments
of sea



Sky Poems - 2

these tainted words that I was
drilled to speak the pathways
i've been shoved along the waters
dripping sleek through brazen dawnings:
more than that:

hands chopped off, tongues
ripped out the crimson stab wounds
the mutilation blood-letting
consecration hard done by
elevation dissolving into sigh


are these few drops of essence
worth a jot worth hope
clutching sleep i think
not gliding interworlds
the sweet, remembered dogrose
the greedy sweet pea





Sky Poems - 3

power
wind
dust
scattering
power
blowing
grief
scattering
you
dropped
in
water
icing
water
froze
withheld
power
wind
dust
unthug
ashes
hurtled
kisses
clasping
chewed
churtled
power
wind
scatter
scatter



this is what they see
a sluggish sky no need
to call it no need to
have lips moist with excitement

it is the usual sky

the muscles of the sky
demeaning

they are sluggish in their seeing
struggling to set sights on beyond
their mothers used to sing
them to sleep

lullabies stretching one
arm to the sky as in
singing

the children be dreaming
they become trees


in this world baobab acacia and ash
or dreaming they become donkeys
that have never been ridden and their
plodding

and their circling lips become sun
so many exits to the other

an apricot lolloping
from a tree in time
for sunset

they hung into caves sometimes
caves and tentd

muscle loss
in silent contemplation




muscles of the sky
are demeaning
the children sluggish in
their lifting of eyes
struggling to set sights
on beyond
on beyond on beyond
but the stars nod
knowing they're coming

for they contain all:
somewhere in the universe:
the last pineapple chunk caught between
your toes
jasmine incense burning in the midday
meadow

a bobble on a purple beret wriggled free
a dropped stitch on a child's aran sweater
picked up
john coletrane puffed out in clouds
here I stand. There are strands
of dawn pink and grey pebbled blue
this swath of light and birds coughing
their songs and chirruping low
to the ground

I am low to the ground
but I have felt the moons of Jupiter
with my eyes all four within my grasp
and if Jupiter has moons then what have i?
what is a moon and where does its orbiting
take us
the air brings fresh life



to each of my pores and we have been
showered with shadows of words
and stories and sailors following
their instincts tumbling from
one place to the next with the stars abetting
a dog is held and loved
are all the wisps clouds
like children letting sand glide through
their fingers
my fingers are cold but they have nothing
on temperatures in space or the varieties
of grasses
light licks in
silhouettes give way to firm form
all things I feel
as dawn determines my place
in the whole
land of dryness
you can hold the moon in your clutch
slow endeavouring reupholstering
surfaces all fragile
as worms floundering
dust that shrinks your eyes plunders
your bowels
tiny insects to flit
finding moisture
in dryness
an end in an unfurlment
a swing and a stillness
a death and a cry of being
I am beholden to the sky
Transfixed by the mysteries



Maya Chowdhry

Daughter of daughters

born of Yakshis slurping tree sap from
Shorea robusta in Dehradun. Heart feels
rough

bark scrape skin to hold, shifting she spawns
Shakti

in the quantum moment five giants oppose
nature,

pilfer to patent life with their mechanical
minds.

Wearing the universe between her eyes
that look

to the line of the horizon as a moving dot, a
seed

in the hands of each and every one
pollinates us

as freedom fighters, saving as an infinite
action

that can change everything. She, we, are
one,

if you eat from the earth then it's at her
table.



A moon's promise

A moon's promise of night navigation you
walk the Holloways and I will pinprick high,
a map of ancient myths lest you forget.
A southern sea voyages towards me, waves
of meteor showers, comet tails, debris
you say, don't see the secret rocks with
an alchemy beyond stars. Carve this airy
atmosphere with scratches of clouds,
a womb of seedbeds, a combing
of yesterday's path.

Becoming the sky

Stars outline the bones of a hand
holding the earth, starlight to mineral
in eons of becoming.

The universe fractures

– the light we see is not the light that is.

Whale sees pool of light in sky's ocean,
plankton seeding, opens her mouth

– night feeding before the spring tide,
breaching the surface.

Moon sees whale in a curtain of her light
spills her gaze, if she had a mouth

– she'd open it in wonder at the prowess
of whale.

Stars decompose their brightness in
human eyes

as the seeping light of dawn brings birdsong,

– sleeping the constellations into the
horizon.



Whinchat

Aviator of appearing and disappearing
you live on the current of magnetic north
a flicker of mimetic wintering
your eons spawn millimetres into
kilometres.

Feathers tighten as restlessness finds
favourable winds
you buff the breeze with a stomach full
of spiders
as you speed north sun lengthens
savannah and
the old world flycatcher banishes
a Ghanaian summer.

A passage to other lands fledges feather
to flap
to soaring and outer journeys, a tail fans
as flight perches itself eyeward to an island,
memorised migration mirroring skyward.





Julia Desch

Dew on the grass

A waxing gibbous moon hangs pregnant,
expanding towards a September equinox
swelling her belly till the precious
moment of release at full tide.

Dew on the grass deep in its wetness
waits with her for the sun to drip-dry
the steaming earth.

High in the sky stars stare at tiny
pin-pricks lit by a moon shadow,
a dazzling dark ocean far below
and we remain asleep in the midst
of our waking while the world spins on
according to its own rhythm.

Becoming the sky

I am a sky to you upon the earth
I am your being when doing stops
I am the one who holds the space
and your heart expands to fill it
by becoming the sky.



This hour of dark

Step into this eye-opening clear night
surprise

And taste the dark after a sodden day of fog
where stars greet us suddenly in all their
myriad
shapes and colours unclaimed by hubris.

This comely darkness where sky is full
of light holds unknown treasures
to be discovered, sounds which belong
to other worlds with spacious intent
that offer a home to longing,
a sense of infinite belonging.

Here we enter unmapped heavens
viewed from earth or ocean alike,
territories over which we have no
command, no mastery except as onlooker
where a miracle of mystery makes
fools of our pretended wisdom.

So, step again into this hour of scent and
sound

where we are surrounded by luminous eyes
and listening ears and take a deep breath
for nature offers her own order
and seeds of magic are not always sown
in bright sunshine.




Nightfall in full moon

Evening soaks up sunset and twilight
entices me outside to imbibe
its last shifting shadows.

These old hollies, majestic in size
line the field edge, no longer a colour,
not yet a silhouette, more a soft sensation,
deep tones holding a setting sun
into a memory of purple layers.

Contours round steep pasture show sky
in rosy bars dissolving into blues and reds,
a last discord as sun dips out of sight.
Cross-roads echo this meeting point of
day into night as twilight's transition steals
in.

On one side a harvest moon close enough
to touch rises hugely orange, veiled by
peach trails
and the driveway beyond soaks up pinks
and gold with borrowed light.
Night creeps upon me as I turn to find this
moon
Already sailing upwards unperturbed.
Trees expand and sink into deeper shadow.
That fullness of the dark feels its way
towards me
warmed by hints of scarlet tints,
becomes a living presence touching us
with the boundless embrace of darkness.



As this ceremony of night-fall spreads
over and through me from half-light to dusk
and dusk to darkness,
I am touched by this gracious presence,
by the holy depths of nature's gift of rest.
It enfolds me while I walk towards home
carrying in my arms my beloved companion
Of the live-long night.

Pegasus is passing

I am carried in the air
wind blowing through my nostrils
and the power within me strikes terror
in those beneath my pounding feet
They, who look up, say "Pegasus is passing
run, hide in the caves till his shadow is
gone!"

One beat of my wings crosses oceans,
Leaves smoking earth below or fountains
Springing under my feet.
Who know what can come in my wake?
They who look up say "Pegasus is passing
Run, hide in the forests till his shadow is
gone!"



I hear the silence and long for music

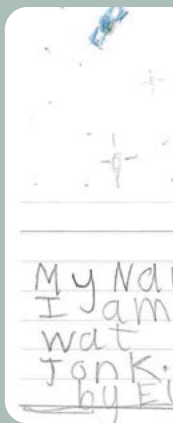
When I listen to the sky
I hear echoes of infinity,
the time when sound was always locked
into sacred spaces for us to discover
rhythms of pure sound before language
shaped sounds and we understood by
listening,
listening into the deep places of the earth
and sky, one sending to the other, brother
sound
and sister sky inextricably linked.

All contained by the sky and rising up
From dark caves and dark places to join
In heavenly echoes.

When I listen to the sky I hear echoes
of infinity back in time where Kyros tells us
a story, the glory of the one time
brought down by the clouds and stars
as far as Mars and planets revolving
and all memory is held here in the Records
until the right to reach in is earned.
When I listen to the sky I hear silence
And I long for the music.

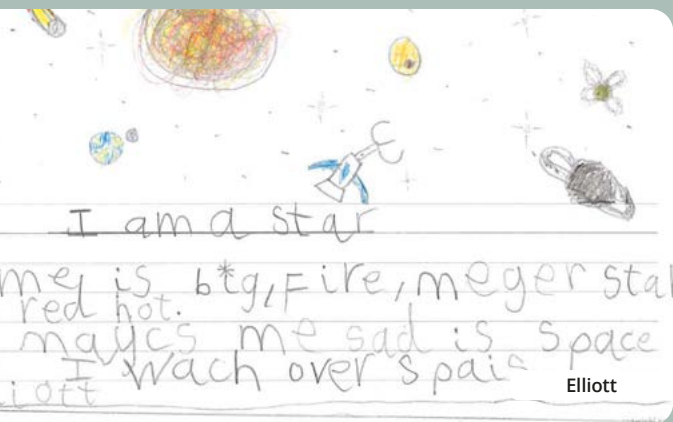


I am a star
 my name is Sosida
 I am golden
 like a adventure
 sad because
 people leev the
 lifes on when
 look up then peo
 not see biel Hen



I am a star. I am a white star
 favorite thing to do is make
 stars and some are planets
 like people who don't look
 my friends and my
 space star. by Harley







Neala Luna

Mythic sky

I see you

On your raft of bleached-white teak

A pinpoint of light which winks from
an inky sea

I gallop across the sky to meet you at dawn

Let's shatter the armour that brings you
to me

My hooves reveal the wellspring of words
within

Let them spiral forth to fill vast unsaid
spaces in between

A constellation of words for fellow wayfarers

On rafts of bleached-white teak

Following pinpoints of light on the sky's
inky sea



Ronnie McGrath

The Sky Wears Blue for No One

The sky unbuttons its robe of reason
and spills a thousand featherless birds -
each one humming a colour unnamed,
each one dreaming backward.

It stretches like a thought too vast to finish,
a whisper left behind by the Goddess
who forgot her own stories.

Sometimes it swallows clocks,
ticking in tongues of thunder,
time melting down the long cheeks of clouds
like wax from candles mourning the sun.

Beneath its breath, we are paper
folded into longing -
kites with memory instead of string,
soaring not to fly, but to remember falling.



The moon sips tea from a saucer of wind,
and stars blink like lies
we tell ourselves in candlelight
to keep from becoming smoke.

The sky is not above,
it is within -
a mirror turned inside out,
reflecting the dreams we forgot
were never ours.

Sphere

Clouds sip midnight tea,
moons unravel like loose threads -
sky dreams in reverse.

The Unblinkered Consonant

The sky drinks its scent,
clouds swim in forgotten jars,
stars hum to the dawn.







Paul Osborne

The waxing gibbous moon

Rising high in the dark sky the waxing
Gibbous Moon doth shine,
Three quarters shines bright, the remaining
quarter blind,
Soon to be full and so sublime,
Rising high the waxing Gibbous moon doth
shine.
Dark shadows over the roof tops do recline,
Two lovers sit beneath a tree, their arms
entwined,
Whilst high above the waxing Gibbous moon
doth shine

Floating spirit

I float between the Earth and sky,
I watch the World as it goes by,
I see the Sun rise over head
I see the bright colours of the Earth beneath,
I see the clouds float by my side,
I see the rainbow arch reach across my
world,
I watch the birds flying as they pass me by,
I am a spirit between Earth and sky





I am rain cloud

I am Rain cloud,
I am life to seed,
I am Darkness during daylight,
I am coolness in the scorching heat,
I am rain cloud,
I am not here every day,
I am freedom in the air

Does sky have a sound

When I listen to the sky I hear,
The rustling of the leaves as they dance
in the breeze,
The singing of birds in nearby bushes
and trees,
The buzzing of the industrious bees,
The clap of thunder in a storm,
The drone of planes flying high above,
The drumming of a woodpecker
on a nearby tree,
The crashing waves on a single beach
far away,
When I listen to the sky I hear,
The children playing at the school,
The water cascading down a waterfall
The tinkling of a charm of Goldfinches,
The gurgling of a chalk stream through
the valley,
The squelch of muddy clay underfoot,
The beat of my heart in tune with these,
I hear the world in the sky



Annie Philpott

Pegasus

*After a workshop with Geeta Roopnarine
at Shaftesbury Arts Centre*

I consider joining the dots of
phosphorescence
Or Edge with death
Brawling with this skin hunger
that eats me alive
Alpheratz is my confident
Beta my lover
Moon taunts me then ghosts me
Then overwhelms me again
Each time I must make amends
With star beta lover, steady,
consistent, but without a chance
Really
Star lover is over the bow, then leeward
High joy when they are starboard
As phosphorescence crests there
And I swear I saw their glaring eyes
in the blazing flashing throng





Beached

*After Neala Luna's workshop – Shaftesbury –
long ago a stone felt a tingle on its skin inspired
by Jarod K Anderson*

One upon a time a pebble had an orgasm

Arching under Magnetar

Exhibitionist for the whole night sky

A new sensitivity in pebble millennia

She first spread the word

When supermoon and king tide would let
her

And winds were up

Screaming her joys, rolling, smoothing,
giggling

The smooth, pure limestone, veined pebbles
got it first

Flinging themselves wide open undertowing
for kicks on the Portland beds

For maximum effect

They had never been so scared of new, or
shame, or touch

And soon it was a full on pebble sex party

The dark mudstoned fingers of Kimmeridge
Bay, ached

But found they were destined to edge
forever

Against the relentless rise and fall of
Oceanus Britannicus

Slate had an easier time

Nervously crumbling bit by bit, unnoticed
but bit by bit, shyly they hugged the
doorway

The near vertical fold of the Purbeck
Monochrome
Easing from soft subtle sophisticated
Wealden Clay
They had not been out since the Cretaceous
party
Breathing Up, Erupting Expanding with skin
hunger that screamed
And they hit space
It had been so long those rocks were born
before coming was invented
Before anyone had named the
Dorsetshire gap
So they blew fossils
Like kisses
They hugged inferior oolite,
rubblely cornbrash and corallian
Because fading moments like these
were tenuous
Mounting seas would once again spoil
the party
The morning after the pebble had her
first orgasm



Dexter

Skindust

I am cloud smoke

I am bereft spotless pure cerulean lightly damp sheet

I am a ferris wheel on its final journey

I am the little blue dot we all touch with all our fingers on all our screens

I am circling back

I am The Pleasure Portal

I am always false fingering you

I am curating your hair when you sleep

I am half a roughly hewn gifted rhubarb crown facing frost

I am the universal Disney dream making bubbles constantly

I am becoming the dripping tap you never fix

I am cloud porn

I am bereft

I am skindust edging into your corners







Geeta Roopnarine

Land of liveliness

in the land of liveliness, all is quiet
a time of awakening
a bee traces a line
between a flower and hive
a bird begins its song
my heartbeat changes
each heartbeat
in conversation with a dried stalk head
each heartbeat
with the molten orange of the new day
I no longer wonder
why grasses in the meadow
have turned to the east,
even the fragile ones.

Moon dust

moon-tide, sway of clouds
moon-glass, mirroring of my eyes
moon-rise, a feeling deep in my pelvis
moon-heart, my heart circles
around the stars
moon-door, an opening in my soul
moon-center, I stand with my head bowed
until the gibbous moon rises
and whispers
this is you; this is me.



Becoming sky

I am the invisible gauze
a fisherman throws in the sea
I am the bridge between galaxies
the stepping-stones between your heart
and your dark innermost caverns,
the ones you are afraid to sit in
afraid to come face to face
with whom you are
afraid to see that
I am the net
waiting to hold you
as you are about to fall,
I am I am

Sound of wind

forgotten snippets of memory
a woman singing to her daughter
a drummer playing tabla at a wedding
ants building a nest
earthworms digging tunnels
clouds turning to rain
droplets on a dasheen bush leaf
an image of a cloud cobra
rearing its head for an instant
then transforming to an owl
on darkened road
at 4 am in the morning
stars falling to the earth.



Listen

travel deep down
past the ochre sand
past the bedrock
to whorls of ammonites
imprisoned in black marble
frozen in time
as if waiting with messages
in a language
you can no longer understand.

think of roots
how they go down
past the light
creating safe havens
for tiny creatures and
listen in the silence
to worms in the earth.
to worm castings
cocoon as they hatch,
the cracking of mud as they dry

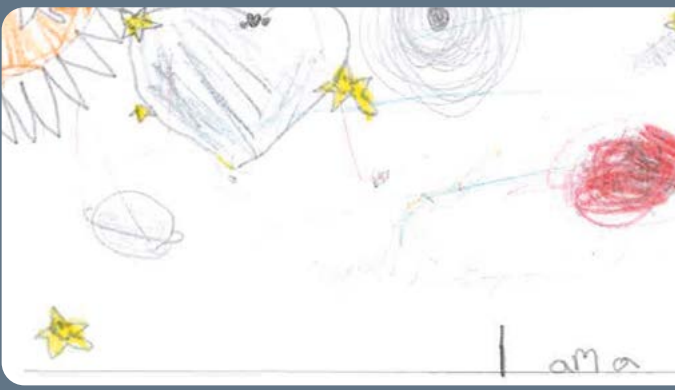
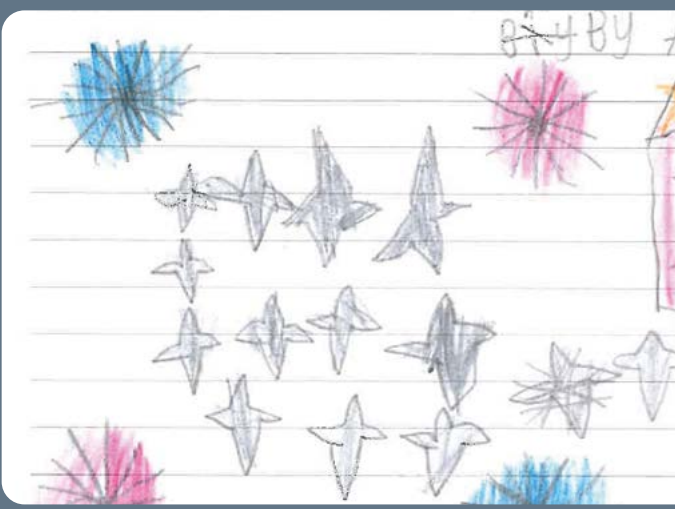
listen
to the soles of your feet and
dust harbouring on your skin.

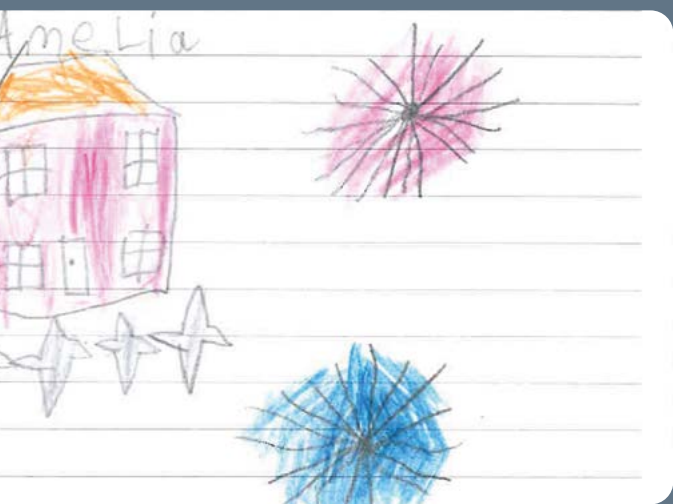


Whale song

I put my ear to my oar
a whale sings his song
seeking a mate
across the Atlantic
but the raucous cavitation of ships' engines
one after the other in a continual stream
fragments his chant
into a litany of pain
while up in the sky
Pegasus is gliding to the west
above him another sea moves
distant galaxies vibrate
spacetime patterns echoing
constellations receiving
reflecting through the dark sky

I dip my oar again in the water
and through the wood,
a heart leaps out
reverberates with the lonely cetacean
and Enif in the horse muzzle,
twelve times larger than the sun.
glows orange.







Milo

am a star
name is Aries
am rainbow
like sparkling
am full when no
one sees me

Mel





© Paul Howell

*The Day shows us the Earth;
The Night shows us the Universe.*



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