

# Instead of a Preface, a Frontispiece<sup>1</sup>

*by Georg Fassl*

The sun has a diameter of 1392000 kilometers and still belongs to a category of stars called yellow dwarfs. For comparison, the largest stars in the universe are called red supergiants—one could line up around 2000 suns across their surfaces. And yet, despite being relatively small, the sun accounts for over 99.8% of the mass in our solar system, and its luminosity—its total radiated energy—corresponds to the output of 100 million billion nuclear power plants. Moreover, its distance from the Earth is, on average, about 150 million kilometers. Since light travels 300000 kilometers per second—the fastest speed at which information can travel—it

1 FRONTISPIECE, as if the piece or plate in front of a book; but really from Mid.Lat. *frontispicium*, the decorated front—the face—of a building. Cf. Hensleigh Wedgwood, “On False Etymologies,” in *Transactions of the Philological Society* (London, Taylor and Francis, 1855), 68–69.

takes about eight minutes for the sun's rays to touch the earth's surface.

Bigness and great force are overwhelming qualities, violent at times. But without the sun's intense energy, there would be no life on Earth—it warms the oceans, stirs the atmosphere, generates weather patterns, and gives power to the growing green vegetation that provides food and oxygen for the Earth on its journey orbiting the sun. For earthly life as much as for its cosmic context: “Nichts Schöneres unter der Sonne als unter der Sonne zu sein...” [Nothing more beautiful under the sun than to be under the sun...].<sup>2</sup>

People have wondered about the nature of nature for millennia. This universal question has left its impressive mark on plenty of texts, images, and works of art, in which the sun—central to many of those—is to be found in the same ambiguity, abundantly generous and threatening alike. In contemporary contexts, be it popular thought or academic discourse, two notions are usually kept apart, and in many cases, rightfully so. However, their incommensurability is not naturally so. In colloquial language, we know of these forces too—we address them whenever we come across

2 Ingeborg Bachmann, “An die Sonne,” <https://www.deutschelyrik.de/an-die-sonne.html> (accessed February 23, 2022).

something that intuitively “leaves us speechless” or “fills us with awe.”

Contingent observations like this can be traced to the beginnings of Greek speculative thought—dating back to the Milesian school—where some of “those [philosophers] who discoursed on nature” discovered them in a geometric relation. Similarly, architecture, building from its cosmic foundations and position relative to the sun, also participates in such climatic affairs. As the light of noon and the dark of the night are the front and back of the same solar day, it is the play—the winds and weather—of both that renders its buildings alive. And, while looking at them in such undecided measure might open a similar space of incompatibility at first, then, secondly, they might engender a strength equally hard to sort out. Much like sunlight, heat, or smoke, a masterful building conveys power, and yet, just like nature itself, any of those forces refuse to be owned, but they can be contracted to welcome the other nature(s) of today.

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