

# “Earth Below Me, Sky Above Me, Fire Within Me”

## Greenly Spirits Final Project

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For my final project, I was inspired by a quote I found on Pinterest last year. This quote spoke to me in a natural sense, because when I experience nature I feel the sky above me, the earth below me, and fire within me. However, I also relate this quote to the passion I feel about other aspects of my life such as education. I used this quote along with my new knowledge of the sublime, and readings from class to inspire my cumulative work. Originally, I was just thinking about doing a simple set of poems without any pictures. I am a very amateur iPhone-using photographer, but I took a lot of photos for my nature visitations and decided to add a photography element to my project in addition to writing.

One weekend when I was visiting my home in Lewis Center, I took a long walk around our four-acre property by myself. It was the first *actually* nice weekend since the snow apocalypse. The chill wind was brushing up against my windbreaker and the sky was absolutely clear. I am the type of person who loves the sun (especially after a long dark winter) and was soaking up all the rays I could get. After about ten minutes of walking, a familiar feeling began to rise in the pit of my stomach: a sense of calm. I love Clifton and the city, but when my life as a college student means constantly moving and nonstop thinking, my simple backyard is a paradise. Although I would not describe the sense of calm nature gives me as a fire, it does remind me of what fuels the fire of my soul. Papers and coursework can get stressful, but taking a break in nature allows me to reflect on everything I am doing in my life and appreciate it.

As I finished my leisurely walk, I had an idea for my final project. I ran inside to get my sister, a high school girl who loves to take pictures, and told her I needed her help. I instructed her to put on some plain clothes as I grabbed my favorite blue scarf from my room. Although she was initially hesitant about the project, she followed me outside. To capture the “Earth Below Me” aspect of my work, I asked my sister to get in a pose that made her feel close to the earth. As you can see in the photo, she put her hand to the ground and planted her feet. As I took the picture from various angles, she complained that she was getting dizzy. This feeling inspired the editing affects I used from the app Afterlight, by replicating the image and inverting it. In my writing, I explored the idea of the Earth often characterized as a grounded or stationary object. By inverting the photo, I wanted to express that the calmness nature allows me to feel is holistic and not only in the ground.

For the second picture focusing on the sky, the wind began to pick up as the sun was setting. I told my sister to wave the scarf in front of her face in weird angles as I began to snap photos on my iPhone. I really enjoy the picture that represents “Sky Above Me” because it covers up my sister’s eyes and creates a magician-like effect. I often feel like the sky is so far away from me, as well as the stars, and the blue line of color brings the sky down to eye level. One of my favorite things to do when I take walks on a clear day is to look up at the sky and get lost in the endless blue sea. Of all of the pictures, I would say this photo and poem creates the greatest sense of the sublime.

The final picture of this series is the only photo where my sister’s eye(s) are shown. I purposely did this when taking the photos because nature is so dominant when focusing on the Earth and the sky, rather than the fire of the soul. When my sister and I were looking for a place to take this photo, we stopped in front of the duck barn on our property and

picked up a pure white duck feather. Almost immediately, I told my sister to hold the feather up to her eye and look through it like a lens. Although you cannot see her right eye through the feather, I think it creates a powerful effect overall. This picture symbolizes the lens nature creates. As I look through the lens, a fire is lit in my soul, and calmness stills my mind. I also chose to feature my sister in this shot rather than myself because her brown eyes seem to burn under the power of nature. On the final page of my project, I included a messy mash up of the pictures along with a John Burroughs quote, all colored to fit the font color their poem represented. I chose to include this element of my project because although the photos were separated into three different poems, they all go together and are a cohesive work. The Burroughs quote also ties them together.

Although I applied this quote to a specific situation (the title of my project), I recite it quite often in my head. Not only is it when I am roaming the countryside in Lewis Center that I feel the fire nature creates, but when I am walking home on a warm and sunny day in Clifton. I appreciate this project because it is an expression of myself that I do not express much anymore. I love to do creative writing and free form poetry, and this project gave me a chance to get back to the root of my favorite things. From an academic perspective, this project was mainly inspired by the concept of the sublime that we studied all semester. Although I had heard of the term “sublime” before this seminar, I really did not know what it meant. I can now associate the sublime with a definition, readings, and the way that I feel while in certain natural situations. My favorite reading from the course was “A Sense of Place: The Northern Lights” by Sigurd F. Olson that we looked at while studying ecstasy and attention in the sublime. I connected the experience I had in my backyard with the experience Olson had ice skating and looking at the Northern Lights. As Olson skates, he

skates almost effortlessly, focusing only on nature. I can connect to this statement, as I often forget I am walking when roaming my backyard because I am so focused on nature. During his time skating, Olson begins to explore the scientific reasoning behind the Northern Lights, but stops himself so he can fully enjoy the experience. As a future science teacher, I often find myself doing this same thing: trying to forget my biological knowledge of the world to enjoy nature. The moments I captured in my project, such as feeling the Earth below my feet and seeing the sky, are sublime moments like Olson experiences.

I also made connections from "Seeing" by Annie Dillard and "The Art of Seeing Things" by John Burroughs. In "Seeing," Dillard spends time discussing walking "shot-by-shot" through nature rather than enjoying nature by observing. I find myself often having this internal battle while out and about on a daily basis, but also in a purposeful natural setting. Sometimes I see a beautiful flower on campus or the blooming Cherry Blossom trees and I am so tempted to take a picture- but I stop myself. Although I would be likely to get many likes on Instagram for the picture of Cherry Blossoms, it would not be as valuable as meditatively taking in the tree. However, in my project I walked shot-by-shot alongside my sister to capture her sublime experience in nature, although it was somewhat staged. In "The Art of Seeing," Burroughs tells the reader that he cannot tell someone how he or she should see something; he can only share how he sees it. This point from his writing emphasizes the message to my audience. The photos I captured of my sister are how I portray "Earth Below Me, Sky Above Me, Fire Within Me," but that is not how everyone else could or would portray it. The poetry I wrote and photos I took for this project were to express the sublime I feel in nature, and the emotion it lights in my soul. Although my

writing and pictures will not represent the natural fire in everyone's soul, it will show my audience how I am affected by nature and the sublime.