

In late January, I traveled on the Southwest Chief Amtrak from Chicago to Lamy, to visit my partner who lives in Santa Fe. The trip took around 25 hours, enough time to see our sun traverse both horizons, a circle of day and night, of light and dark. Arriving the next day around the time I had started my trip, the previous day. Afternoon to afternoon.

In my Father-tongue, Icelandic, an entire twenty-four hours is called a *sólarhring*, literally translating to a “sun circle.” Measuring a full day by earth’s rotation, our circling. The word *day* simply does not have the same cosmic connotation and movement that appears in the articulation of a sun’s circle.

The Amtrak threaded its way through state lines, from Midwest to Southwest. The tracks brought us passengers through time. I noticed it in the different shades of light that descending as we made each stop from a full sunset into darkness.

In Kansas City, there is an hour stop for smokers and stretchers. This happens at around 10 pm when going West. It has a memorable glowing “Western Auto” sign that floats above the tall silver vehicle. It is a perfect middle ground and a place to say good-bye to the Midwest before sleeping through the rest of Kansas.

After attempting to sleep in my seat, the light woke me up near the Kansas/Colorado line. My forehead was pressed against the window, eyes opening to the light of a morning sky, stained pink and orange and blue. It felt intimate, like I was looking at people’s backyards. Haystacks and old tractors. I was reading *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau at the time. Immersed in the life of a man building a house alone, the beautiful solitude of nature. “I have, as it were, my own sun and moon and stars, and a little world all to myself.” I meditated on his words as I held onto the view out the window, the little view I had, a little world to myself.

I was myself so captivated by the scenery, inside and outside. I imagined the stories of the people who live in the middle of fields, who own farms and land, but also those who get on and off at towns I never knew existed until now. La Plata, Raton, La Junta. Before the flat plains suddenly approached the Rocky mountains.

The train ascended gently into altitude. Ahead lay a red powder of land, a darker composition that created a clear separation of Colorado and New Mexico. The train conductor announced to be on the lookout for a rock in the shape of a whale, which would mean ten minutes to Las Vegas, NM. This was not an obvious whale-looking rock and we strained our eyes to make out the shapes of the mountains. I don’t think anyone found that rock, or had the imagination to see a whale in the cliffs above our tracks. I watched other passengers squint, even after the supposed whale passed our view.

When I left Lamy on the return train, I watched the landscape change in reverse, from blue skies and sun light to a snowy grey hue with dull-colored houses. Every train stop was different, too. From chili peppers hanging on terra-cotta, to midnight smoke stops where I watched strangers

leaning against brick buildings as I lost sense of time. I noticed slowly that mountains were disappearing and as it got dark, new cities were making me forget the beautiful Southwest. As if every time the train made a stop, I lost little bits of memory. They floated out the doors.

There are beautiful ways in which all kinds of people talk to each other, the ways in which America is united in a moving vehicle. Sounds and conversations floated in and out, while readjusting to sea level after knowing the altitude. Readjusting to our seats and views as the noon sun reflected on the Mississippi river waves, approaching Illinois. The Santa Fe Railway following me back home. Reminding me.