

THE LIGHT OF THE MOON

In the majestic scope of creation there is nothing that moves me more deeply, that touches my heart and awakens my fantasy, than the gentle light of the moon. I always await it impatiently; I see it with love and feel an intimate pleasure when I am enveloped by its luminous glow; my thoughts take a new turn, and I seem to go back to those times, so near and yet so far, when my spirit floated in a place of enchantment and poetry.

Several days ago I was watching the setting sun. Its light was burning brightly on the horizon, and clouds were changing into burning bits of color; the movement of the waves was spreading the reflection of fire over the surface of the sea; it seemed like a vast conflagration had enveloped the entire breadth of nature. However, in spite of the beauty and the majesty of this spectacle, my eyes were searching for an object that would soon appear on the Eastern horizon. For a while after the sun had set, the clouds still reflected its light, and the purple sky over the horizon was gradually transformed into the grayness of dusk. Then, in the East, I was finally able to see a thin thread of light, forming an arch whose ends were almost imperceptible. In the days which followed, that thread of light began to appear even later after the sun had set, and it slowly began to take the shape of a semicircle. Its weak glow gave the optical illusion that the entire disc was quite small. And, lo and behold, today the moon finally has appeared in all its beauty, filling the entire night with its calm, mysterious splendor. That thin thread of light had finally become the full moon.

I have never been able to find any pleasure in examining that heavenly body through the lens of science. When I study Nature, I prefer to do it with the light of imagination, which gives all things a warm and vital aspect, wrapping them in a radiant environment that comes from poetry, which not always, but more often than not, is destroyed by the cold breath and the severe gaze of science.

When I look at the moon it pleases me to think of it wandering freely through a space which has no limit, as it casts its gentle and lucid light over everything. But then science comes to tell me that the moon is 350,000 kilometers away from the Earth and is moving in a definite, predetermined direction.

I like to think of it having the diameter which it has when we see it, and I am amazed by how much beautiful brightness is contained in so little space. Science tries to take away my illusion, telling me that the diameter of the Moon is one fourth that of the Earth, and its total volume is one fiftieth of the planet which we inhabit.

Looking at the different shapes and the brightest spots on the moon, I have had the impression that I am seeing a sort of mobile mirror that reflects the changing figure of the Earth in the turbulent waves of its surface. Science takes pity on my mistake and is quick to offer me a long telescope, so I can see that those luminous spots that shrink or grow in size are really the peaks of tall mountains that reflect the rays of the sun, and that the shadows these mountains cast over the wide valleys between them, are the dark shapes that attracted my attention.

Science will not even let me believe that the light of the Moon is in actually its light. It will tell me that this globe is an opaque body. To prove this, it will remind me of the eclipses of the sun when the King of daylight is hidden behind the black disc of the moon which does not permit even the smallest ray of light to shine through it. Then, it will tell

me that the gentle light that beguiles me is no more than a borrowed reflection it receives from the immense glow of the sun.

And after telling me all this, what does science leave me in place of the enchanting image that created my fantasy? It leaves me a planet destroyed by the effect of fire, one which is as dark as chaos and as sad as a tomb, without any noticeable atmosphere, with no vegetation, where all that you can see are deep, empty valleys surrounded by tall mountains in whose depths is the boiling lava which, from time to time, gives us the rare gift of a meteorite.

And that is the Moon, the serene, mysterious heavenly body, which is pictured by poets and treasured by the hearts of lovers?

Take some time to look at it, on one of those nights when no clouds tarnish the pure blueness of the heavens, when, according to the description of a poet, it appears like a drop of dew resting on the broad leaf of a banana tree.

In its light, objects take on a strange, mysterious hue, and the horizon extends into the distance, covered with a layer of brightness. Its gentle rays spill through the leaves of the trees, whose tops are covered with a silvery veil, and the ground is sprinkled with bits of light that shine through the moving shadows. Reflected on the surface of the river, its shape expands, as if it were trying to reach down and search for the little white stones that are seen on the bottom. Over the sea, its light spreads out in different beams, which look like delicate strips of silver tulle that quiver with each breath of the wind. It glistens on fountains like a delicate shower of pearls, it gives a transparency of nacre to drops of dew nestled in the buds of flowers, and it casts its gentle rays over the entire breadth of Nature which then seems to glow with an indefinable pleasure, like that which accompanies the first kiss of love.

On calm nights, under the light of the Moon, my imagination can picture the strange, chimerical beings from legends. The gnomes who guard their hidden treasures come out of their mines of precious metals, or their deep caverns of pearls and coral; water nymphs break out of the transparent wall of their grotto and, seated on the shore of the waters, comb their moist locks of hair. All the strange, mysterious beings that hide in the bosom of the Earth float in the air, shimmer in the fire, or slide through the waves, as they show us their happiness. Only the sylphs, children of the burning rays of the sun, continue to be hidden in their sweet smelling palaces between the petals of the flowers.

There are occasions when, like a chaste matron who covers her face with a veil when confronted by an exhibition of drunkenness, the Moon wraps itself in a mantel of clouds from which a ray of its light may shine out with a dark and sinister glow. These are the nights when evil spirits hold their gatherings, when witches and vampires dance around Lucifer to pay him homage.

The Moon is the cherished companion of lovers. A man who has seen this dim glow, which still has some of the blueness of the sky, reflected in some eyes moistened by love is able to see, in that glow, a future promise of paradise. A woman's beauty seems to be enhanced, when we see it in the light of the Moon; when it illumines her face, this pale reflection gives it a soft tint of melancholy and surrounds it with an indefinable aura, giving a woman something of the celestial beauty of an angel.

And this heavenly body which is so beautiful, so pure, and so melancholy that it has inflamed the imagination of some of the greatest poets and inspired Bellini to compose an unforgettable melody... am I to understand that this is the one described by science? No;

I refuse to accept the generous offer of a scientific telescope. I want to think of the Moon as it appears before my eyes, and believe that it is what it seems. And if this destroys the scientific point of view, so be it, since it enriches the poetic one. And I am very happy to exchange one for the other.