

"THE MOON": AN ORIGINAL SHORT STORY  
WITH CRITICAL AFTERWORD

by

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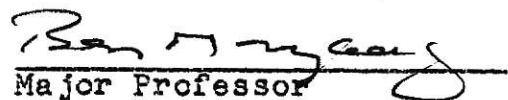
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It is a steep climb, and the night air is noticeably thinner than down in the city. The rocks have proved too much for Jim Eagleplume's bumbling old Ford, so he has left it parked on the shoulder where the road switchbacks perhaps three miles below. He scrambles in the darkness now. The moon, unable to pierce the tree-cover, is no use to him.<sup>5</sup> He has left the remains of the road and taken the steep but relatively even slope of rocky soil which, for all its perilous crumbling, at least has trees to hold on to. There must be an access road, he knows, certainly smoother and probably even asphalted, that winds gracefully up the other side of the mountain, but in his hurry he has taken this one. He is still in a hurry; the underbrush is tiring him quickly, and he wants to get above treeline to rest. The climbing after that will be moonlit and easier, safer. He pauses only to let the ragged breath wash his lungs until it ebbs a little, then goes on.

The darkness he walks through is so full of pine branches that he has grown almost familiar with the lash of needles and the thump of pine cones in his face. He goes with a permanent squint; probably he could close his eyes altogether. Small twigs have snagged in his long, thick hair. It is pointless to fish them out right now. A heavy dew is rising out of the forest floor and soaking the underbrush of seedlings so he is wet to the waist. Not enough moonlight is getting through the trees to warn him of rotting stumps and tough

vines. He has no idea which way to climb except up. He knows that the observatory is built on the very summit of this small mountain, at about eleven thousand feet. He fears that he will reach a false summit and have to descend to a saddle and climb another ridge to reach the top, wasting time, but there is nothing he can do about it.

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He has thought and thought about it and somewhat understands why he has to climb this hill. He is uncertain whether his reasons would be clear if he explained them to anyone else, and if they were, he wonders whether his reasons would seem enough.

He knows that his mother and father were like two legs upon which he stood on the earth; his place on this planet was justified by them. But when first his father died, and then recently his mother, he found himself miraculously suspended with no ties to this planet other than historical ones, memories.

He has a disturbing static dream some nights. Nothing happens, but he is floating in space between the earth and the moon with no spacecraft. His space suit is connected to the earth by an umbilical hose. He knows how he arrived there, but he is not thinking about that just now, because he has just watched the fierce sun wink out behind the curve of the earth, which has become a thin soft blue circle drawn upon blackness. As he is remembering the instant of the sun's disappearance he becomes aware that the other end of the hose, the end that he supposed was connected to important machinery



on earth, is unexpectedly floating toward him. He can see no light below. Behind him is the full moon.

This dream is no mystery to him. He knows it expresses his feelings about the death of his father and mother. Yet he knows he must belong on the earth, that he is an earthling. It is his effort to understand, somehow, why he is an earthling that is making him climb this hill.

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After another half hour he notices the trees are more sparse. There are openings sometimes fifty feet wide, washed by the chalk-blue moonlight that makes the dew on the grass and the stunted pine seedlings shine sharp against the unspeakably dark skyline above him. In one of these clearings he stops, drawing his breath deeply. His mind is balmed to serenity by his exertion. The air tastes sweet. His gaping mouth smiles. He thinks, I am in some of the most oxygen-starved country for miles around, and yet the earth is lush with life.

He falls and rolls onto his back, giving in to the exhaustion for the moment. His black hair spreads slack around his head upon the grass. Blue light gathers in the curves and sweeps of the hair, making the black deeper, oil-black, iridescent. His thick features, glazed with perspiration, catch the light on their ridges. A single light glints in each of his black pupils.

He looks up into the face of the moon. It is the moon he is climbing up to. His eyes try to drink the light

wide open, but it is stronger than he is. He must squint, and this gives him pleasure. He feels one of his favorite feelings: that man is not the strongest force in nature. The plants around him are drinking the light and wishing it were more, and yet they are growing. He knows--has read--that crops grow faster during seasons of the full moon than by sunlight alone. The trees around him, only twisted pines at this altitude, are squeezing the soil and air and sky for every drop of life they can get, like fists.

As he lies here, the euphoric numbness brought on by his exertion begins to give way to many sharp burning scratches on his face and neck and wrists. These, too, give him pleasure, because he knows they will go away with no effort from him. This much he has won from the world, the ability to heal. He has inherited it through the unimaginably ancient and complex mechanism of evolution. He deeply enjoys the knowledge that such healing was around long before men were.

#

As a young boy on the reservation he learned from his religious lessons that his ancestors did not go into the heavens when they died, but stayed on earth where they belonged. For a time this was a comfort to him, almost as if there were no harm at all in dying. But when he was perhaps sixteen he noticed something he was sure his dead father could never again notice, and now he thinks he knows the difference between being alive and being dead--the

difference that makes it so worthwhile for unborn souls to be born, if only to live a little while.

He was sitting in the barber shop called Looking South's, waiting for his haircut in the chair he had always waited in since he remembered first coming in with his father many years before. An old leather-clad man with shoulder-length white hair was in the chair, watching with tired eyes in the large mirror as the hands of Joe Looking South hovered bright sharp instruments around his head. Just the three of them were in the shop that afternoon. There were two ceiling fluorescent lights, pale purple-green and futile against the warm white sunlight of the south-exposing windows, which penetrated deeply enough into the elongated shop to make the varnished pine panelling on the far wall glow from within, like honey. A reflection of the fluorescent lights would flash occasionally in the chrome facets of the barber's scissors or the flat side of his steel comb. The boy would watch Joe's hands comb and gather a parcel of the coarse white hair, the scissors would flash once, and with a whisper like the ripping of rotten velvet some hair would slough to the swept floor. This pattern repeated at a dull pace, the sheared ends of the old man's hair accumulating around the chair like snow. This would be swept away before Jim Eagleplume took the chair.

An old round-cornered brown plastic tube radio made quiet country music on a shelf beside the mirror. When Jim came in for a haircut he expected to listen to at least

an hour of country music; even if he was in a hurry his heart and breathing relaxed while he waited, and Joe Looking South would work patiently, slowly, not so much cutting hair as eroding it. The atmosphere of the shop, with its soft sounds, oily smells, and meaningless mixture of fluorescent and window light, soothed Joe and his customers into an almost therapeutic calm. It was a warm suspension of time like a siesta. Soon you weren't in any hurry to leave.

The boy turned away from watching the hair gather around the chair. He tried to read the magazine, then put it aside on the chair next to him, too drowsy for the exertion even of looking at pictures. He looked out into the street, at the outdated rusty automobiles dully reflecting the flat warm sunlight, at the gray-white concrete walk and the dark blue sky. The sun was up just behind the awning that shaded the four or five feet of sidewalk nearest the window. The concrete there was a deep cool blue-gray, restful to the eyes. His father had always watched out the window, watched the unimportant sunwashed day-life on main street through the painted yellow letters on the dirty glass. It was by imitating his father that the boy had learned, without understanding, that it was important to watch the world through that painted window while he waited, although he could expect nothing to happen. He did not know why his father did this, or if there was any reason at all for it. Even after his father's death he was still watching through that window as he waited for his haircut.

On this particular day he was trying, without being really aware of it, to see only those things that he could see through the first "O" in LOOKING, an oval of yellow paint less than a foot long and six feet away. He found that almost as much happened in that little space as happened in the whole window, and watching became more interesting because of the challenge to his concentration. If anyone had asked him what he was squinting at, he realized later, he would have tried to explain and then he would have felt foolish.

Unexpectedly, as he was watching, his senses sharpened. The air of the barber shop was speaking to him of the oil on the barber's hands and of the hot motor in electric clippers. He felt the sun through the window on his right forearm, he heard the periodic whisp of Joe's scissors. He could almost hear the separate instruments in the radio music.

And then in the first "O" of LOOKING a sparrow fluttered to a landing on the crest of the roof of the store across the street. It sat there one second, as if deliberately posing in the oval frame for the boy. Its mouth opened, its throat moved, and it flew away.

The boy thought about his father's spirit, whether it might be around town enjoying this day. He wondered whether his father could smell the hair oil and see the sunlight. And then, with a mild shock, he knew that the dead could not do things like this. Only he, the boy at the window, had seen the sparrow just then. It was such a small thing, such an unimportant event in that warm day. If his father saw

the bird, he also saw behind it and around it, from every direction, saw a blinding swirl of events, both important and trivial, light and dark, with no way of separating them. His father could not help seeing the bird, yet he could not really see it at all. Everything would be white and white noise, no silence or shadows. Because the dead had no eyes, they had no point of view. His father could not see one way through the first "O" in LOOKING.

It was then that Jim Eagleplume realized that the dead hang around the places where they lived only to be close to the memory of their human senses. He knew this was why spirits seek to become human: because only human beings can understand beauty at all.

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Lying in the damp night grass, he can feel stones and needles here and there against his back. He senses the thick, passive authority of gravity. He knows that if he falls asleep here he will sleep dreamlessly, without fear or discomfort.

But he is not sleepy. The moon is halfway up the sky now, intensely bright. He raises his hand before his face, forms a tight triangular hole between the tips of his thumb and two fingers, and squints through this hole, holding it just near his eye. The astigmatic smear clears, the hard glare dims until he can make out features on the moon: tiny pale craters, white radial streaks; and a torn-paper roughness around the lower edge. He thinks, this is what people must have done before telescopes, this is prehistoric astronomy.

The muscles in his arm grow fatigued, and he lets it down. Again the moon is unbearably brilliant, as fresh and washed as it seems every time he looks at it now. He remembers the first time, a month ago, that his attention was drawn to the power of the moon.

#

He had been working in the city when the letter had reached him, marked "urgent" and forwarded three times, telling of his mother's death on the reservation. The news was two weeks old and had followed, like an abandoned dog, the meaningless trail he had left in three towns, five meaningless jobs. The tribal official who had sent the letter had addressed it to a place he hadn't lived in for two years. That was how far Jim had drifted from the reservation where he was born.

The letter was written with the gentleness appropriate to fresh news of a fresh death, delivered to someone who would care. He did care, reading it, and yet he had seen the forwards and the postmark and the ironic red "urgent" before opening the letter; as quick as he read of her death, he mourned her; and as quick as he mourned, she was a memory. He hadn't seen her for so long that even the memory was dusty and bleached. An image appeared and vanished before him of the tiny white rectangular house with the weedy lawn and the dull-coated old '62 Ford parked in the dirt under the kitchen window, everything, the house, the weeds, the car, sitting in still sunlight.

He worked on for a little less than a week, growing more and more impatient with the sweaty routine of the job. It was during this week that the dream first occurred, he remembers, about being suspended between the earth and the moon. It made him restless and his work meaningless. One day he was running a bead of weld down a seam. He watched the brilliant spot of light through the visor, watched it finish its work, then he pulled the rod away and the circuit was broken, the crackling light stopped. He arose suddenly, pulling off his helmet and shutting off the welder, and looked at the clock. It was over an hour until closing. He went into the office and told the foreman he was quitting, asked for his pay. He stood on one foot as the foreman slowly went to the safe and counted out his pay, then handed it over while trying to meet Jim's eyes. Jim felt him looking and ignored him, took the money and left.

He withdrew his savings at the bank and took the bus to the reservation to see his mother's grave. It was an unsurprisingly inornate grave, with fresh-sprouted weeds breaking the cracked sun-bleached white dirt, marked with a simple small round-topped stone. From the cemetery he walked the mile of highway to the house. The car was still there; he went straight to it, not looking at the house, and found the keys still in the ignition. He drove to the tribal headquarters and told them he was taking the car. They had him sign some papers. Then he drove next door to the general store, filled the tank and checked under the



hood, and left the reservation.

When he got back to the city he calculated how far his money would go. He had enough not to work for a while, so he got his camping gear out of the closet and began arranging it for use. He bought enough jerky, dried fruit, canned vegetables, and crackers to last a week. He put the food and his tent, bag, tarp, and utensils into his backpack. He drove the Ford forty-five miles into the mountains and parked it where the road ended at the edge of a Federal wilderness preserve. He hiked far enough in that he could be sure not to meet anyone, not even the few hikers who might still be out this late in the fall. He knew, also, that the creekwater up there would be fresh; the area was upstream of any town, and pasturing was not allowed. He looked forward to the water, the cool break from the lowland heat, and the solitude. Late in the afternoon he found a rounded hump on a ridge below a small mountain that barely broke treeline, with a small clear creek running in the ravine below, and pitched camp on that hump. He sat before a tiny fire near his tent that evening, watching the sun disappear behind the ridge, listening to the cold night breeze sweeping up the valley. The forested mountains expanded into blue distance like folds of crumpled blue-gray velvet dropped there to shelter the warm earth from night. The sky light lowered and the haze moved in from the distance; nearer and nearer hills lost their distinction, their power to penetrate the soft air. He thought how even in the afternoon

light the hills had seemed stretched out asleep, insulated, and the mindless noise of wind and birds had seemed like the pleasant snoring of a day-sleeper. Now, the day-sounds dying, the sleep deepened to drugged oblivion. The pale colored light rounded all the creased ridges, the night breeze began to stir like dreams. At last the peach light faded from the ridge and the sky deepened to black and the stars came out. He felt entirely alone, a little cold. It was his intention to discover, through his isolation, something about his place on the earth.

His plan was to wait as long as necessary until some slow revelation or some epiphanic flash came to him, but after an hour or so he realized he would have to revise his expectations. A week might seem like a long time to him, but the longer he sat in the night breeze, the clearer it became that to this preoccupied and patient wilderness it was little more than a brisk, audacious courtship. He could not synchronize himself with eternity. He went into the tent; after a while of listening to the fluff and pop of the tent fabric in the wind, he slept uncomfortably, unused to the cold.

After only three days his impatience, he was pleased to realize, seemed to have evaporated. He slept more soundly now. He no longer expected insight, expected nothing more than to hike in the daylight, sit by the fire and watch the sky or the weather in the night, and sleep when he pleased. At moments he was unsure just how many days it was since he

hiked in. The few day-cycles had assumed the illusion of numberless waves washing over him. He would walk up on the ridge several times a day to look out over the hills into the heart of the wilderness preserve. The hills always undulated into the distance, rising and falling like the breath of sound sleep. He would walk for hours sometimes, calculating somewhere in his mind whether he might stay longer than he expected; part of him marked the days, but mostly he enjoyed the gentle sway of day into night into day. He ate less than he thought he would when he had packed. Time seemed to stretch out for him.

But it was on the fourth night that his senses really awakened, that he saw the wilderness's shadow side. As the sun went down that night, the feeling came to him--it had never seemed so before--that the wilderness had finished its other business and was finally turning its attention to him, to see what it might do with him. The night drew the sky aside, uncovering him, and looked down on him. He became inexplicably uneasy. The valley below him seemed actually to fill with darkness, like a great ghostly sea lapping at the ridge, at his ankles.

It was an uncomfortable disturbance in the soft undulation of days which he had come to take for granted. He waited under the sky, tense, letting the fire die out in front of him. He felt safer, less visible, without the fire. He kicked dirt over the red coals. He knew he could not sleep; in fact he felt uneasy just sitting before his tent in the

dark. Hoping that movement would break the mood, he rose, thinking perhaps he would go to the stream below and fetch water for the morning. Just before he knelt to enter the tent he looked to his right; the wooded ravine plummeted into blackness.

It was a strange impulse, he realized, to go down into the trees now, when in the dim starlight he could hardly see his tent in the clearing. But he had been to the creek many times and the path was not dangerous. He knew that fears like this were best confronted, that the best thing was to plunge right down into the ravine. The idea thrilled him; he hadn't walked at night more than twenty yards from his tent since he'd come here, and he didn't know why. He had always loved the night, always felt that nighttime was when the world really opened its eyes.

He crawled into his tent and found his plastic water bottle and his flashlight. He tested the light, but it was so weak it would hardly give useful illumination inside the tent; outside, especially in the forest, it would even be distracting, making ghosts out of nothing. He threw it aside; he could do without it. Even a strong flashlight was so directional that it drowned all vision in the periphery. Perhaps it was better all around to trust his senses and his memory. He left the tent, slung his bottle-strap over his shoulder, and started off down the slope.

The scree and rocks crumbled under his boots; the slope was steeper than he remembered, and treacherous if he wasn't

careful. The night breeze blew up against him from the valley, cold and pine-scented--almost entirely pine-scent and moisture, as if there were no air at all, just a mysterious mingling of pine vapor with uncondensed dew.

When he entered the trees he could hear the breeze only faintly, high above him. With each step the incoherent soil seemed steeper. The darkness seemed to have honed the terrain vertically abrupt. Soon he heard no movement of air at all--the space around him was edged with alertness. Then from below him came the gurgle of the stream echoing up through the still woods. Everything he had heard in the woods by day, the racket of the birds and squirrels, the high winds, were quiet now. Only the stream splashed on unconsciously. Jim Eagleplume began to feel as if he had interrupted some conspiracy.

This feeling grew steadily stronger. As the rotten footing and the tug of gravity dragged him downward toward the stream, something else repelled him upward, and he struggled down in violation of that force. He could have been entering a lifeless, uncreated wilderness. He would stop to listen, and he would see faint colors in the darkness, colors unassociated with vision. Through his mind flitted odd fragments of thought. He felt plagued, not by silence and darkness, but by these spontaneous sensations, lacking any real stimulus to compel his attention. He needed tangible reins on his senses, he felt unfixed, drifting. His fear embarrassed him, but it was dark, the ground kept

giving way under him, and there was no sound but the stream to orient him; even the stream echoed insanely, its cold splash and splatter knocking among the trunks below him. It was a hollow, passionless rattle that seemed to invite demons into the empty woods. When at last he heard the water just before him, he approached it like a burglar, carefully kneeling and groping to find a place to catch some in his bottle. Brittle-cold water pecked at his knuckles, shocking him. He pulled his hand back, thinking, Doesn't any living thing inhabit this place at night? Have I pitched my tent over a ravine that is forsaken at sundown by every creature except this cold mineral stream? The stream seemed to him the most primitive kind of animate being imaginable. He shuddered and shook his hand suddenly, felt cold droplets striking his face. Quickly he removed the lid and held the bottle out until he felt the icy water splashing lightly on his hand, and waited while the bottle slowly grew heavy. He pulled it back and desperately recapped it. He turned toward the slope and suddenly the sense that he had stolen something became acute. He struggled a few yards upward when a second sound cut through the branches overhead, a thin high yip-yip-yip that he recognized, with a rush of relief, as a coyote. The coyote made him aware of the hills outside the woods, far from the stream. He scrambled quickly toward the sound. That cry, he knew, boiled out of blooded flesh.

He broke from the trees just below his tent, where he

could see the higher ridge a couple hundred feet above him, outlined against the pale wash of the Milky Way. The cool, sweet night air hit him abruptly. The coyote cried again and Jim Eagleplume saw him, a dim form bouncing up across the ridge. One or two others were waiting for him.

The sky seemed lighter than possible. There was a soft pink illumination spilling over the hills below and driving the darkness down. He traversed leftward up the slope to see around the ridge above him. There on the horizon swelled impossibly large the deep red hump of the rising moon. He looked long at it, relaxing, drawing profound tranquility from it. Again the coyote barked, this time landing on a high howl, when another cried out, and another, a swelling fugue of staccato yelps and howls. He looked up and saw their silhouettes clearly, trotting to and fro in a group. From the right, from the other side of the ridge, one coyote after another ran leaping to join them, as if a new wind drawn by the rising moon were sweeping them there into a pile. They seemed bouyantly alive on their thin tough legs, full of animal anticipation and unconscious purpose.

Jim Eagleplume listened and watched with strange joy as the pack bounded noisily off the ridge into the valley below the moon.

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He gets to his feet and feels the wind chilling the dew that soaks his shirt. As well as he can, he brushes

the needles and grass off his back. The cold fabric clings to his skin.

He looks at the slope above him. It is a little less steep than what he has been climbing, and the trees are fewer, sparser. He will have easier going now, and he will have the company of the moon. He cannot be far from the summit.

He wonders, as he walks, whether this pilgrimage is in fact completely irrational. The more he considers it, the more its irrationality pleases him. All he seeks is a sense of where he fits into the world. He knows that, biologically, existence is its own justification: a creature belongs on earth because it has managed to exist. Jim Eagleplume knows he can claim this birthright, but because he is human he must question. No--that's not it. It is not his mind that is compelling him. It is something deeper, something dark and thick that drives him with images, a ghostly persuasive knuckle in his groin.

He is out of breath, so he pauses and looks up at the ridge ahead. He is startled to see the small silhouette of a perfect dome--the observatory. It must be no more than two hundred yards up. It is rim-lighted by the moon on the left side, like a new moon itself. He walks quickly at first, then more slowly so he can catch his breath as he gets closer. He arrives breathing deeply and sweating before the seamless rounded concrete wall; in front of him is a steel door, painted gray, with a locking silvery-steel knob.



The moon pours a liquid light over the knob.

He hurts his fingers knocking on the door. There is no answer, but he waits. It is a large building. The astronomer may be too far away to hear his knock. He pounds again, harder, then turns away to look out across the valley.

There are no towns or cities for miles, or he would see their glow. He knows that artificial lights are hostile to astronomy, the stars make so little light, and that's why the observatory is out here. He wonders whether perhaps the full moon might also inhibit observation of the stars. The night is very clear, but even when he blocks out the moon with his hand the sky is not quite black, the stars are dim.

He turns to pound on the door again, but before he can, it opens inward. The sharp glare of an unshielded incandescent bulb comes through the crack, warms the ground outside with a widening shaft. From behind the door a tall figure steps in the way of the light, stops full in the doorway. Jim looks up but cannot see a face. The ceiling light is directly behind the head.

The figure speaks: "What do you want?" The voice is dry as dust, as if it hadn't spoken for centuries.

"May I come in?"

At first the astronomer does not move, seems to disdain even to answer. At last he makes a move to the side and the hard light, uncovered, stings Jim's eyes. The man disappears around the door without a word. Jim walks in and finds the

room richly warm, and empty. There is a door in the wall to the right; it is open, and dark beyond. There is nothing else in the room but a waste bin and a coat rack full of empty hangers. The voice comes from the dark door: "Close the door, please." The last word is cold, not courteous. Jim closes the outside door and follows the voice.

Beyond the door the entryway light fades and Jim finds himself in darkness. He walks on, feeling the closeness of the walls near him. He realizes he is in a hallway, and wonders whether it has a light, and why the astronomer hasn't turned it on. Maybe it is because this is his territory, he knows it so well that he needs no light; turning it on would be a courtesy for strangers, but he has forgotten his manners. Or else he is using the dark deliberately to intimidate his visitor.

"Here is the door," the dry voice crackles unexpectedly, just in front of Jim, who withholds a shout just successfully enough to reduce it to a harsh, half-voiced sigh. To his left a tall crack of light appears, widens to a doorway. Into the doorway steps the figure of the astronomer. At the same time Jim feels a cold draft falling out of the lit room. He sees the man's profile for just an instant as he passes through the door; all he can remember for sure is the nose, which reminds him of a keel, though for its size it does not protrude very far, but holds close to the face, pointing downward right at the tip as if there were a drop of water hanging from it. The rest of the face leaves no

impression, seems as featureless and severe in silhouette as an axe. It seems to Jim that the man is bald.

The room they enter is the one Jim Eagleplume has been looking for. It is the observatory itself, a cold vastness with a roof gashed open to the night. He pauses in the doorway and watches the astronomer, dressed in dark heavy clothes, walking away toward the center of the room, the clicks of his footsteps echoing almost endlessly. Jim confirms that the man is indeed bald. In the center of the room, forty or fifty feet away, is a tight configuration of desks, computer components, lampstands, and a shining steel ladder rising from the cluster into the thin dark air above. It ends in a platform about fifty feet high, made of wrought iron. This platform appears to be near the central pivot of the telescope, though in that high, hazy semidarkness Jim cannot distinguish the pivot mechanism amidst the maze of mysterious steelwork. He sees the form, almost a shadow, of the telescope itself: a hundred-foot featureless shaft, perhaps ten feet in diameter, colored something like a dark gray, streaked with a few highlights from three tiny electric bulbs spaced across the ceiling of the room--a lofty ribbed dome, vast and distant as a cathedral's. Jim hears a soft clank and looks down: the astronomer is ascending the ladder. The echoes of his shoes on the rungs accumulate until the dome fairly roars with the sound. At last the man reaches the high platform and steps onto the iron bars, which sound a new, lower timbre, atonal and shivering.

Jim wonders at the uncanny authority even the simplest sound assumes in this cold resonating space.

Up by the astronomer one dim light comes on, illuminating a large panel of dials mounted by the platform. By this light Jim can see the platform a bit more clearly--it is one of two oblong ones which run alongside the slanting telescope. The one the astronomer is on is bordered by a narrow catwalk which connects to the top of the ladder. There is a thin wrought-iron guardrail around the outside of the catwalk.

Abruptly another sound, a low whirr and then a deep rumble, begins filling the room, and Jim perceives that the entire dome is very slowly rotating. This gives him the most disturbing sensation, seems to move the floor from under him, twisting his knees. He wants to sit down. He closes his eyes until the rumbling stops.

He wonders if the astronomer has forgotten him. "May I watch?" he says, but the echo that comes back to him sounds so much like dying footsteps that he doubts if the man on the platform understood him.

"If you want to talk," comes the reply, all but mangled by reverberation, "you have to come up the ladder." The sentence is delivered in two halves, with time in between for the echoes to die.

Jim approaches the ladder, impressed by the noise his footsteps make. What must it be like, he thinks, to work in a place like this alone, having every move you make amplified

a hundred times?

He reaches the top of the ladder and steps onto the catwalk; looking down and tightly gripping the guardrail once before he lets it go, he steps across the six-inch gap to the platform. The astronomer is hunched over what Jim assumes is the eyepiece of the scope. All at once Jim is impatient to see the man's face, know his name, confront him. "Excuse me," he says, more forcefully than he means to.

Very simply, the astronomer turns around. His face is what Jim has somehow expected, cold and pale, like clay. He has black hair around his ears and the back of his head, but above that he is quite bald. The flesh and skin of his face hang flaccid as wet cloth, as if ready to slough off at some command. The top of his skull draws the scalp tight, rising against the drag of his heavy flesh, drawing his pale features vertically. His eyes are black with sloping lids, the wrinkles drooping tiredly toward his large, sagging ears. If the face were to smile, Jim is sure it would be comical, and this makes it even more oppressive. His dark gray suit, apparently woolen, hangs with the same exhaustion. His pale yellow shirt seems ironic.

"Do you want to know my name?" the astronomer asks. "It is Simmons." His lips release the words the way heavy velvet drapes admit the night wind.

"I'm Jim." A name for a name, thinks Jim; one of yours for one of mine.

The lips move again, slowly. "What is it you want?"

Simmons' eyes rest quietly on the visitor, as patient as decay. Jim Eagleplume remembers, as he studies Simmons' eyes, the old shaman who taught him the tribal religion as a child: the face long, drawn, but dark red-brown from the sun, and somehow quietly happy. No one ever thought to disobey him, yet he never spoke loudly, never commanded. This Simmons is a pale shadow of the old tribal teacher, inhumanly austere. He never feared the shaman, but right now he is chilled inside. He wishes he were on an open plain with a retreat path, not on this high platform in this strange place. He begins to sense the sophistication of the unfamiliar machinery, and it makes him feel very primitive.

"What do you want?" The tone, the eyes are exactly the same.

"I wanted to look at the moon."

The dark eyes narrow the slightest bit. "What do you suppose you will see?"

"I'm not sure. I just want to look."

Simmons turns away and leans over toward the telescope, peers into the eyepiece. "You will learn nothing from looking at the moon," he says. "It is hardly more interesting than the earth below you. It is only a lump of rock and dust, with a hot center, slowly growing cold." These words ring for a few seconds through the air beneath the dome, then die away and leave the dark figure silently staring into the telescope, utterly still. Jim watches his hunched form

and is shaken lightly by a shudder of contempt. He hates the astronomer's slow, dry speech, his lifeless expression, his smug power over the telescope. He hates the cold of the air inside this dome; he doubts whether much sun gets in here, and he knows that if it did, Simmons would be away sleeping in a dark place.

After a minute the astronomer draws away from the eyepiece, still with his back to his visitor, and tilts his head back to look directly up through the gap in the dome, toward the stars. He repeats, "What do you suppose you will see?"

"I won't know until I look," says Jim, "maybe nothing." Simmons is still looking up at the night sky. Jim wonders what he is seeing, and looks up. The moonlight is making one edge of the opening look like a shaft of silver.

"All the important phenomena," Simmons says suddenly, "are farther out. The most I can say about the moon is that it gets in the way."

Jim is about to offer to leave; he sees nothing to stay for, and this place is chilling him to his very soul. Before he can speak, Simmons turns to him abruptly. "You don't need this machinery to look at the moon." There is an irritating condescension in his tone. "Do you know how much it costs to operate this machinery for just one hour?"

"No...I'm sure..." There seems to be nothing to say about it, so he lets it drop. There is a silence.

Again the astronomer's eyes narrow slightly; he seems to smell something unpleasant. His tired eyes follow Jim

Eagleplume's hair down to his shoulders, then roam over his face, at last meeting his eyes. "Is the moon some kind of a god to you?"

Jim catches his breath, and he sees Simmons' eyes brighten for an instant. It is a perverse look and Jim hates it. He relaxes. "Maybe it is a god." He sees no reason to let Simmons play with him, or to hide anything. He knows he can never explain himself to the astronomer.

Simmons leans over and peers at some calibrations on a pair of black steel arcs amidst the swivel mechanism. He takes a small brown notebook from his coat pocket and writes in it. "You have two minutes until I must begin photographing a comet," he says, and the echo lends his words emphasis. He reaches out and twists three dials on the lighted control panel; there is a whirr, then a rumble. Jim feels the platform moving under his feet and grasps the guardrail. Simmons flips a small lever on the side of the eyepiece. "You will need this filter to look at the moon. It is far too bright." He looks through the eyepiece for a moment as moonlight slowly spreads from the tip of the telescope, far up in the dome opening, downward along the cylinder until Jim can see the moon moving into the slot overhead. The whirring and rumbling stops. "You have two minutes," Simmons repeats. "What do you expect to see?" Then he turns away from the scope and brushes past Jim as if he weren't there, as if his question was not a question at all. Jim goes quickly to



the eyepiece and squints into it as Simmons' footsteps clang down the ladder. Jim feels a surge of hatred for the man, then tries to give all his attention to the telescope.

At first there is nothing but blackness, not even any stars. Then on the right side of his view appears the silver-white edge. At first Jim is confused--it moves so fast--it has moved halfway across the view before he realizes that the moon's edge doesn't even appear curved, just a straight vertical boundary of white gliding across the blackness, shimmering from the heat distortion of the earth's atmosphere. In seconds the edge has moved all the way across and the circular field is filled with flat whiteness with huge pale craters drifting steadily across it. He feels as if he is in a low-flying craft sweeping across the moon's face, much too low and too fast to understand what he is seeing. It is the magnification, the magnification is too strong. Great flat smears are swimming past too fast for him to study them, and he can't stop them. He remembers that there are tracking devices on these big telescopes, devices to stop this motion. This telescope must have one. Has Simmons left it off deliberately? Jim watches the steady parade of gray and white patches helplessly--furiously, certain that Simmons has mocked him. This close a view is useless without tracking, and Simmons must have known it. He listens without interest as Simmons' sharp footsteps start across the floor behind him; he knows his time is running out, he feels foolish for begging this time in the first place. He hates Simmons

for his arrogance. He is growing irritated with the bleached-gray blur in the eyepiece and is considering walking away from it, when unexpectedly he sees shadows.

At the edges of the craters appear thin black borders--long, sharp crescents which the atmospheric distortion causes to writhe like frightened blacksnakes across the view. And they are growing darker, thicker. Jim knows the sweep of the telescope is getting close to the moon's ragged shadow-edge. Soon the craters look like fat black sickles, and quickly, too quickly, the shadows are filling the bowls like ink, until Jim can see only the thin, shivering white rims.

He feels morbidly fascinated by this. He wants to see into those shadows, where the light may be softer than in the sun. He wants to see into that sliver of shadow territory just beyond the ragged edge of the nearly full moon, but it will be too dark--the view is almost all blackness now, swept by bright white lines and points. He is on the border of the shadow territory--he knows it will pass in seconds, it will be all over. He will need more light, he must find the lever that removes the filter before he can see anything more. Abruptly he hears the clang of Simmons' foot striking the bottom rung of the steel ladder. Jim Eagleplume's fingers find the lever on the side of the eyepiece just as a last isolated crescent of white light, a lone crater rim catching the last sun before darkness, swims off the left side of his view. The noise of the ladder has

filled the dome. He moves the lever.

At first it is darkness again, as before. He hopes he hasn't inserted some second filter by mistake. Then he faintly perceives a soft ghostly blue landscape, stood on end, sinking to the left. It shudders with distortion and passes out of sight so quickly that he wonders whether he may have imagined it. Then a single star pierces the center of his view and glides to the left. There is a hand on Jim's shoulder, as cold and heavy as if a lump of mud had dropped there.

"Move aside." The hand drags backward firmly, pulling Jim back until the base of his spine bumps against the guardrail. It sways slightly; Jim balances himself and looks down, then up at the sky, trying to forget the image of that one star and to remember what he can of the faint blue landscape. He closes his eyes as Simmons moves in front of the controls.

"I have work to do," Simmons says. "There are people who pay for the use of this telescope." Jim ignores him, but the reverberation of the words shatters his concentration; he opens his eyes. Simmons is bent over the control panel, putting his small notebook into his coat pocket. A low whirr begins, then a deep rumble. "You have to leave now," Simmons says. He doesn't turn around. Jim never sees his face again. He steps across the gap from the rotating platform onto the catwalk, descends the ladder as quickly as he can, and leaves the way he came in, shutting the door

behind him. The moon is high.

#

Jim stumbles down the ridge as fast as possible, wanting to put the observatory far behind him before he finds a place to rest. He looks up from time to time at the moon high above his right shoulder. It, and the cold, thin night air, reassure him. He enters a stand of twisted pines and moves more slowly, looking for a clearing. Eventually he comes to a level spot where the branches thin out and separate above him. The blue moonlight is turning the grass of the round ridge into silver fur. He walks out onto the bare ridge, lies down, and folds his hands behind his head. He can feel the dew soaking through his boots and socks. The bright moon makes his eyes water, forces him to squint. He looks at it for a long time this way, then closes his eyes, satisfied that it is the same old moon.

He brings the ghostly blue landscape into his mind. It is hard to be sure whether he really saw it. Even for that instant in the telescope it seemed once removed from sight, like the landscape left on the retinas during the redoubled darkness following a single burst of lightning. Maybe he was seeing only the after-image of the sunlit craters that had passed out of view. Or it may have been real, maybe the rim of the earth's atmosphere flung a trace of light where the sun could not. The image fades from him slowly; he remembers the star and opens his eyes.

His questioning has had no effect on the moon. It

pours down its strange light. He squints carefully and inspects the moon's torn left edge. How wide was the band of darkness, of blue landscape? He can't see anything now; his slight astigmatism turns the glare into a watercolor gone out of control.

Jim Eagleplume sits up in the grass; the wet shirt pulls away from his back with a soft sound. He looks out across the hills, listening. Probably it's too late to hear coyotes, he thinks; they'll be abroad by now, hunting, making use of the light. It's too bad. Coyotes are a comforting sound. Jim doubts if they know what they howl about, but they express themselves so eloquently.

Following the broad ridge, he resumes the awkward downhill stumble toward his car.

-end-

## CRITICAL AFTERWORD

I. Introduction

The first draft of this story, a thirteen-page fragment that I wrote early in the Fall 1981 semester, was radically different from the draft presented here. The main character, Jim Eagleplume, was about the same as he is now, although scantily developed; the astronomer was a completely different character: a young graduate student from a nearby astronomy department, dressed in jeans and having a youthful sympathy and receptivity for Eagleplume's curiosity about the moon; and worst of all, the first version occurred during one of the NASA manned moon landings: Eagleplume, tired of watching the TV transmissions of the landing, wanted to witness this event as directly as possible, through a powerful telescope. Even now that idea fascinates me, especially because I talked to a member of Kansas State's physics department about the possibility of focussing a telescope upon the moon accurately enough to see an object the size of the lunar module. It is possible, provided there is a rare momentary calm in the atmosphere called a "convection pocket," provided one uses a refractor telescope, provided the module is near the terminator so the shadows are exaggerated, and so on--in other words, it might be believable in real life, but in fiction, never. I put the story aside indefinitely.

Then after my father's death I experienced a period of probably morbid preoccupation with death and dying, psychological

self-analysis, and "afterlife." I emerged from this experience into what I think is a healthy equilibrium: a deeper appreciation of the phenomenon of life on earth, and a positive acceptance of metaphysical mysteries which refuses to be frustrated by the lack of sure knowledge. Trying to express these attitudes to friends, I found myself borrowing a metaphor from the plans for the old "Moon" story: the image of a person at a telescope, totally involved in observing the limited view there, intensely absorbing all he can, knowing that his short time to use the telescope is about up. "My time at the telescope" became, for a while, my stock expression for appreciating the life experience.

Gradually this image accumulated such a complex of emotions and philosophy that I wanted to set it down in a single creative expression, partly because I thought it would make a good story and partly because such a creative act is for me a useful catharsis, a "wrapping-up" of the whole psychological experience; once I externalize an idea like this it ceases to obsess me and falls into perspective.

The ideas I had to express in this story were a challenge because I had never before tried to handle so abstract a theme. One danger of an abstract theme is that in the creative piece it may appear concrete--a crystallized corpse of the original idea. My goal, and this was an instructive challenge for me, was to capture not only the lesson and powerful mood of my experience, but also its elusive feel, its ultimate mysteriousness. I pursued this by representing Jim Eagleplume's

psychological journey in a series of external experiences; through symbols and connotative diction I have tried to elevate these experiences of Eagleplume's to a broader-than-literal significance which in certain passages becomes even allegorical.

The draft presented here is an extensive revision of a complete draft which was based only superficially on the Fall 1981 fragment. Only three pages of the original thirteen, describing the climb up to the observatory, were adapted to the first draft of the present story; I used that passage as a "frame" for three flashback episodes: the dream, the barbershop, and the wilderness preserve.

I had two acquaintances read and criticize the first full draft. Their most useful comment was that the several parts of the story lacked a clear unity of direction or purpose and needed to be "aimed" at some central idea which was, to them, ambiguous. Acting upon that advice I inspected the draft to see what motifs seemed to be working most effectively, and how those passages could be rewritten so as to direct the reader's attention more surely toward what I considered the center of my story. Some of the motifs I found operating in the story were "accidental"--that is, I attribute them to an unconscious association process: the associations evoked by a passage stimulate the writer's unconscious to enrich the passage with details that resonate with the thematic significance of the events or scenes described. It is because of this kind of "accident," for



instance, that Jim Eagleplume's sighting of the bird through the first "O" in LOOKING so closely parallels his sighting of the fleeting "blue landscape" in the shadowed crescent of the moon, through the telescope. Close inspection of the two passages will reveal numerous parallels; some of them I was surprised to find in the draft, and others I introduced in revision because I felt that the effect, although flawed, was worth developing.

Besides this kind of reinforcement of the apparent natural rhythms of the story, there were four major changes in the narrative between the first and the present drafts: first, I added a description of the interior of the barbershop because it evokes a tranquility necessary to Jim Eagleplume's frame of mind, and because in it I could introduce in their first manifestation some of the story's recurrent motifs. Second, I added the background material taking Eagleplume from his hearing of his mother's death to his retreat in the wilderness, for the same reasons given for the first addition. Third, the first draft contained, just before Eagleplume's arrival at the observatory, an uneventful, prosy one-page passage about cosmic rays and their effect on human behavior, a possible physiological explanation for Eagleplume's behavior. I condensed it to half its length, then decided it deflected the mood of mystery; I excised it, and the wound healed without a scar. Finally, I completely rewrote three times the description of what Eagleplume saw through the telescope, because in its original

form it was muddy and lacked clear connection with the important themes in the story.

## II. Pattern and Rhythm

"The Moon" is about Jim Eagleplume's search for an orientation of his inner self with the natural world around him. His problem is his impatience for definite answers, which leads him first to inquire too deeply into the workings of his own soul, and then in counterreaction to turn his attention with unhealthy intensity toward the physical phenomenon of life around him. He finds every indication that the meaning he seeks lies in both spheres, the inner and the outer, but the meaning is not the kind he can grasp; it is elusive, mystical. Finally, repelled by fear in the first case and by frustration in the second, he learns to accept both the existence of meaning and also that meaning's elusiveness: he learns to appreciate life in a comfortable perspective. E. M. Forster, in Aspects of the Novel,<sup>1</sup> discusses two qualities of fiction which are useful in discussing this story: "pattern" and "rhythm." He points out that a story has a unifying pattern or shape--for example, Henry James's Ambassadors is organized in the shape of an hourglass, with the dispositions of the two main characters crossing each other exactly halfway through the novel and then progressing until the characters' attitudes have completely reversed. I see "The Moon" in the shape of a sine curve: a trough followed by a peak, coming to rest

finally on the neutral line.

The downward plunge toward the trough, begun by the death of Eagleplume's father, is accelerated by the death of his mother. He descends into his own psyche through isolation and introspection. The low point is his confrontation of the primeval stream (p. 16), the most primitive level of his own unconscious, quite impersonal and alien--Jung's "collective unconscious," the subterranean current from which all people, perhaps all animals, ultimately draw their meanings. Although this stream can provide him answers, he is repelled by fear of close contact with this fundamental psychic reality, so he ascends and seeks outside himself for manifestations of this same phenomenon in the natural world at hand. When he discovers the strange power the moon seems to have over the coyotes and even the night landscape (p. 17), he crosses the neutral line and begins a new phase of his quest.

The upward climb toward the moon, actually initiated on the first page in medias res, climaxes in the observatory, an environment equally as repulsive as the wilderness ravine, though in a different way: it is cold, like the stream, but not because of some primitive nature; rather because the sophisticated instruments (and the mind of the astronomer himself) are focussed so far outside the realm of the living that they ignore life itself. Nevertheless, just as he drew from the stream in spite of his fear, he observes what he can through the instrument. Though he is frustrated in

trying to look at the relatively nearby bright moon through a device designed for observing the distant, dim stars, he nevertheless comes away with a faint scrap of vision, a pale and ambiguous piece of truth, the blue landscape (p. 27). He reaches equilibrium on the return down the mountain when he puts the observatory behind him and is content to enjoy life without clear answers. "Coyotes are a comforting sound. Jim doubts if they know what they howl about, but they express themselves so eloquently" (p. 31).

This is the "pattern" of the story. Its "rhythms," as Forster would call them, are those recurring motifs which unify the mood and the theme; they imply an association of one passage with another through the repetition sometimes of a word or phrase, sometimes of a movement or shape, in a different context.

At several points throughout the story Eagleplume's feeling of disorientation, suspension, lack of foundation is evoked: first in the dream (p. 2), where he is suspended above the earth with his umbilical hose broken; then in the barbershop, whose atmosphere is a "warm suspension of time like a siesta" (p. 6); then after his mother's death, when he pulls the welding rod away from the metal and breaks the circuit, then quits the job (p. 10); and again on the platform in the observatory--Simmons frightens him so that he "wishes he were on an open plain with a retreat path, not on this high platform in this strange place" (p. 24).

Another motif is the effort to penetrate with understanding

beyond the normal limits of perception. As he enters deliberately into the dark ravine, "something else repelled him upward, and he struggled down in violation of that force" (p. 15). Later there is the general picture of the observatory dome rising atop a small mountain, the telescope itself aimed through the dome and the atmosphere into the stars. And on page 28 Eagleplume "wants to see into that sliver of shadow territory just beyond the ragged edge of the nearly full moon."

There is a larger motif which appears three times in the story. In each case a succession of images like those just mentioned composes a characteristic flow of thought having four stages: a concentrated and collimated attention, an acuteness of peripheral sensation, a fleeting and ambiguous observation, and Eagleplume's contemplative association of that observation with the idea of death.

The first occurrence of this motif is in the barbershop. Eagleplume turns his attention through the "O" in LOOKING; he begins to perceive minute smells and sounds around him; the bird appears; and he wonders whether his father's ghost might have seen it. Later, in the wilderness passage, the motif is paralleled: he deliberately enters the mysterious ravine; he is frightened by strange, baseless sights, sounds, and thoughts ("It was on the fourth night that his senses really awakened, that he saw the wilderness's shadow side," p. 13); he is shocked by the "brittle-cold water"; and he wonders if the ravine is "forsaken...by every living creature."

Again, near the end of the story, he pushes past his fear of the observatory setting and peers into the scope; he hears Simmons' footsteps amplified, as all sounds in the observatory are amplified, by the reverberation of the dome; he sees the blue landscape for less than two seconds; and later, recalling the vision, he wonders whether he has really seen into unlit territory, or whether it was only the after-image of normal vision.

There is a very deliberate use of symbol, not only in these motifs, but throughout the story. The image of the full moon and its soft illumination is everywhere meant to represent a healthy level of unconscious, intuitive understanding and the beautiful and reassuring appearance that such understanding projects onto the otherwise frightening night landscape. The hidden branches and crumbling dirt of the woods represent obstructions in the irrational unconscious which frighten and inhibit Eagleplume. The coyotes, "blooded flesh" joyously bouyant with "unconscious purpose," represent Eagleplume and the ideal equilibrium he seeks and eventually finds.

### III. Evaluations

I do not see this second draft as the finished version of the story. It has weaknesses which it may take the perspective of a year or more to set right.

The story line is simple; the strength of the piece is not to be found in its action. It has been my intention

to maintain in this story a meditative bias, because so many of my stories depend on a fast pace and an element of surprise for their effect--I wanted to improve my ability to bring out deeper levels of thought behind action. I suspect that the opening passage may mislead the reader into expecting an action-packed climbing story, and that when the pace slows for the dream and never really picks up again, the reader may lose interest. A future revision may be to amend the opening to initiate very early a more physically slow-paced and psychologically turbulent mood.

As it is not an action story, so it is not really a character story. Of course, Simmons is deliberately two-dimensional because I do not wish for him to upstage Eagleplume; but even Eagleplume is developed only fully enough to forestall curiosity about his background and motivation. Some readers may find this insufficient, especially those who find the action too simple. I feel that Eagleplume's motivation for his present quest is strong enough to sustain the story, and that to elaborate on his character would draw the reader's attention away from a more important purpose: to express, through symbolic narrative, an impression of a period of psychological turmoil.

It is upon its symbolic level that the story is intended to achieve its effect. Of course, this does not excuse it from maintaining interest and plausibility on the surface. Straight allegories such as Pilgrim's Progress often read



more like essays than stories; a good story must entertain on its surface narrative level. But this need not be all its appeal, and many narratives with strong symbolic resonances have relatively simple surface plots which depend on the undercurrent of mood and theme for much of their power. The "action" of Melville's Moby Dick may be described in a page; most readers know the outcome of the novel before they read it; and yet the rich buildup to that last hundred pages of whale-chasing and ship-sinking, all those passages of cetology and ocean lore, establish a mood of awe and supernatural mystery that makes the familiar ending sound a psychological depth far more important than the action. Similarly, D. H. Lawrence's Women in Love is slow-paced on the surface, but Lawrence's attention to the psychology of his characters and to the expression of exact shades of emotion gives unusual power to each development in the action. These two novels were my models for this kind of writing: I have tried to achieve through incremental reassertion of the important images in "The Moon" something of the effect Melville achieves in his many meditations upon the vastness and mystery of the oceans and the prodigious authority of the sperm whale. In shorter passages I have tried to imitate Lawrence's use of scenery description and brief action to portray abstract ideas and emotions. For example, in Chapter XIII of Women in Love, Birkin and Ursula watch this action between two cats:

He, going statelily on his slim legs, walked after her, then suddenly, for pure excess, he



gave her a light cuff with his paw on the side of her face. She ran off a few steps, like a blown leaf along the ground, then crouched unobtrusively, in submissive, wild patience. Then Mino pretended to take no notice of her. He blinked his eyes superbly at the landscape.<sup>2</sup>

This is a concrete representation of the position of Birkin and Ursula toward each other in their present conversation. It is graphic, unmistakable, yet it asks the reader to interpret, or at the very least works subliminally to reinforce the emotional context of the lovers' conversation. In passages throughout "The Moon" I have tried to use my narrative in much the same way, with Eagleplume projecting onto his perceived environment his moods of disorientation, uneasiness, fear, anticipation, and peace.

It is my goal that such passages work subliminally, without the reader having to interpret consciously the tenor/vehicle mechanics of each metaphor. This goal will be one basis of future revisions. Ideally, the imagery should work its effect not by presenting the clues to a puzzle, but by creating a context of mood against which the reader may view the action. If, in order to accomplish this effect, it becomes necessary to build a more fully developed main character or to complicate the story line, I will do so.

#### IV. Conclusion

"The Moon" has been an instructive project for me. It is not the kind of story I am used to writing, or the kind I usually read; I prefer stories with more complicated

plots, more vivid and unusual characters. I usually use a great deal more humor in my narratives. I like stories that achieve a powerful mood, but I have never before attempted to express such an elusive frame of mind or to sustain a very contemplative tone. I am encouraged, however, by the way this story has developed, and expect that the skills I have sharpened here will enrich the atmosphere and meaning of my future writing.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> E. M. Forster, "Pattern and Rhythm," in his Aspects of the Novel (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1927), pp. 149-69.

<sup>2</sup> D. H. Lawrence, Women in Love (New York: Viking, 1973), p. 140.

"THE MOON": AN ORIGINAL SHORT STORY  
WITH CRITICAL AFTERWORD

by

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Abstract. "The Moon" is about a young man's search for the relationship between his inner self and the natural world around him. Disoriented by the death of his parents, Jim Eagleplume becomes impatient to understand the meaning of life. First he seeks isolation, inquires too deeply into the workings of his own psyche, and is repelled by fear of what he sees there. In counterreaction he turns his attention outward upon the phenomenon of biological life. He sees the moon as the face of some force behind life on Earth, so he tries futilely to discover its essence through a telescope. At last, still suspecting that his answers are to be found both within and without, but despairing of realizing them clearly, he learns to accept both the existence of meaning and also that meaning's elusiveness; he reaches a comfortable perspective.

The critical afterword reviews the story's conception and development, then analyzes it regarding E. M. Forster's terms "pattern" and "rhythm." The story's pattern is a sine curve: a plunge into the unconscious, followed by an ascent to the mountaintop observatory, and a return to the neutral line. The rhythms, or recurring motifs, are identified: images of suspension; instances of penetrating the limits of ordinary perception; and a thrice-occurring larger motif in four stages--a concentrated and collimated attention, an acuteness of peripheral sensation, one fleeting and ambiguous observation, and Eagleplume's association of that observation with the idea of death. In a final evaluation, the story is regarded as simple in plot and characterization, owing to the author's deliberate emphasis on the thematic operation of the symbols.