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A New Yorker's New Moon: Anthony in *The Beautiful and Damned*

Eriko Sano

Introduction

Anthony Patch in the nineteen-tens and twenties finds new moons in New York where Rialto was spectacularly decorated with artificial lights. Artificial moons seem for him to be more attractive than the real moon, because he believes that the real moon cannot have stability and intensity of artificial ones. Anthony needs something eternal that illuminates his fragile romantic splendor of youth. Comparing Fitzgerald's Anthony to Keats' Endymion and finding meanings of moons for each will help to understand Anthony's dread of losing youth and his relationship with the real moon and the artificial ones. Anthony's conditioning and his way of treatment of the real world and his illusionary world tell more about them.

In this essay, I would like to show importance of lights, especially moons, as a means of describing emotions of Fitzgerald's heroes. I will argue how Anthony establishes the relationship with moons, and how it works for him with a penchant for living in his own illusion, in order to reveal sadness of Anthony obsessed with seeking for the eternal splendor. Moons in *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922) assume ironical tone because of his mis-relationship and misjudgment of them.

I. Moonlight in Fitzgerald's Works

Fitzgerald reproduces an atmosphere of a place, delighting the senses by depicting lights. His fictional world is enkindled by

emotions emerging and submerging here and there in his works. Fitzgerald's letter to his editor in July 1934 conveys that what he had attempted as a writer was "to recapture the exact feel of a moment in time and space" (Turnbull 270). It tells that Fitzgerald believed that a writer's obligation was to be faithful not to photographic realism but to realism of his or her emotional feeling. In order to effectively let readers visualize the image of what characters see and feel, a writer needs to record accurate impressions of it in such a way as to stimulate readers' senses to capture the mood. Such subjective descriptions of impression allow readers to relive feelings and emotions of characters, especially heroes, because Fitzgerald has been pointed out that he tended to assimilate himself to his heroes. Biographical works on Fitzgerald and his wife, Zelda, tell how deeply he drew inspiration from his own and their experiences and emotions. Lehan examines Fitzgerald's novels and recognizes the assimilation. He remarks that Fitzgerald "was continually projecting himself into other places and other people" (Lehan 71). Fitzgerald composed stories to be suitable for demonstrating his heroes to whom he projected himself. In such stories, places become projections of his heroes as well. Fitzgerald intuitively knows that mood is essential to portrait heroes and depict their emotions and feelings, and that lights are quite useful to capture the mood.

Stern, in his 2003 essay, judges that in *The Beautiful and Damned* Fitzgerald still overused lights just for producing a luxurious romantic mood. Seiters sees that moonlight mainly connected with joy and sorrow evoked by young love neither adds any profound meanings nor gives any clue to decipher his fictions. "Fitzgerald's prose," Lehan says, "is inflated to create a moonlit, magically heightened world of youthful splendor" (42). Lehan argues that Fitzgerald, in prose, attempted to create an

illusionary world enhanced by moonlight, just like Keats did in poetry.¹ In the two men's minds, only youth can keep romantic illusion. "Like Keats, Fitzgerald was painfully responsive to the mutability of beauty and the evanescence of youth" as Brucoli comments (*Some Sort* 71). Their susceptibility to beauty and youth appears as illusionary worlds perishing easily in their own works.

For Fitzgerald's heroes, the splendor of youth is an exultation inflamed by love affairs they involve themselves in. With moonlight, their imaginations work full to the extent that they feel the love affairs much more glamorously than their real experiences. Fitzgerald's heroes seem to be reluctant to take their head out of the sand. They look at the reality not objectively but through filters of their emotions. They tend to dramatize the reality. In this essay, I would like to use the term romances for the heroes' love affairs made grand by their imaginations.

Romances of Fitzgerald's heroes are indissolubly connected with moonlight, like the one unified with passion and beauty in the heart of Endymion of "Endymion" (1818) by Keats at twenty-three years old, as Matsuya analyzes. In the Greek myth, loved by Selene, the Moon Goddess, Endymion is given eternal youth by sleeping forever. Keats starts his poem from when Endymion wakes up, which means Keats' Endymion, haunted with the dread of losing his youth minute by minute, has to struggle to cling to youth. On this point, he shows an obvious similarity to Fitzgerald's Anthony Patch in *The Beautiful and Damned* who is scared of aging at thirty when his youthful splendor will disappear, he himself believes. What is notable about aging is that Anthony has no means to remain in his youth, unlike Keats' Endymion who falls back into sleep again at last.

Both Anthony and Keats' Endymion combine moonlight,

passionate love and beauty of women in their imagination. Moonlight for the two is linked to enthusiasm, exultation and agony of love. There is a difference between them, though. Keats' *Endymion* sees illusion in the real moon; on the contrary, Anthony sees illusion in artificial lights on which he imposes a romantic image of the moon in books and his experiences. It may be partly caused by the fact that without any ideas of how to stop aging, his fear of losing youth deepens, so that he instinctively avoids depending on the real moon which, because of clouds for example, does not appear every night, and is always waxing and waning; he needs a stable romantic light constantly shining every night and pouring always the same intensified light.

II. Faux Moonshine: Artificial Lights Replacing the Moon

(1) A Neon-Lighted Rialto

In Burns' *New York: an Illustrated History*, there is a painted picture depicting "the Great White Way" full of lights from windows of buildings and cars, and of signboards in Rialto near Times Square. Here in this area, in 1897, the first artificial lights were installed; in 1906, circumvoluntary windmill neon turned up; and, by 1913 when twenty-five-year-old Anthony got an apartment in the mid-town in the vicinity of Rialto, more than one million incandescent bulbs burned out every night (Burns 295). Rialto, vibrant with lights and people, offered Anthony distraction to temporarily forget his loneliness.

(2) Anthony Alone in His Apartment

Loneliness surges up in his mind once Anthony goes back to his apartment where other apartments and buildings obscure the vivacious Rialto from his view. Now being alone in a quiet room, he becomes quite conscious of his loneliness. In the apartment, he cannot see Rialto from his window, nor hear horns of

automobiles on the Fifth Avenue. He somehow comes to think that the vividness of Rialto was disturbing him and now he is free from all hysteria of Rialto, through his mental process for keeping him from bringing a panic. His conditioning explains it. He has lived in terror of death and loneliness since his mother died when he was five, and his father died when he was eleven. In order to escape from the terrible condition, Anthony learned to stimulate his imagination by reading to fly away from the harsh reality, or fantasize by looking at his many-colored stamp collections. By the age of sixteen, he had already refined himself in his comfortable illusion. In addition to entering his illusory world, he found another solution to dispel his terror and great loneliness: he exploited his imagination to reverse the way of thinking. Now at the age of twenty-five-year-old, after coming back to his room and visioning a bombing scene in a fiction of a severe civil war breaking out in New York, he projects an image of war onto the vivacity of Rialto. He changes a feeling of loneliness into relief to finally get peace by secluding himself from the hurly-burly area. He now regards the Rialto as a vigorous and hectic place, and his apartment as a shelter protecting him from the vigorousness.

Anthony in the unstable condition of mind thinks that a light of street-lamp looks like moonlight. "The arc light shining into his window seemed for this hour like the moon, only brighter and more beautiful than the moon" (*BD*² 458; emphasis added). "[S]eemed" tying up with "like" muffles a nature of objectivity or actuality from the sentence. It foregrounds subjectivity and impression of Anthony, which insists on how Anthony is feeling, rather than what the arc light is really like. The moon reminds him of the past sweet days in Rome which he spent just before he moved here. "[M]any moonlight excursions" gratified him who appreciated attractiveness of Italian girls (*BD* 443). From

then, Anthony inseparably associates moonlight with romances.

Anthony cannot find any outstanding neon lights nor the real moon in this hour of midnight from his window; and, he admires the arc light as more romantic, than the real moon. Seiter thinks that it is because Anthony feels secure in the artificial rather than in the natural he fears. His account omits the most important issue, though. When Anthony wants to feel romantic and comfortable, he would not compare the secure arc light to the dangerous moon, if he really feared the natural and the real: in that case, why should he try to take trouble to remember the real moon to feel sick? What really matters in a consideration about the artificial and the natural for Anthony is that which light is more stable or not. He wants something constant that promises to keep nourishing his illusion, eternally if possible. It accounts for why the arc light enraptures him. He seems to want the supreme light only existing in his own illusion sprung from his imagination, that is, engendered by him superimposing the romantic image of the real moon on the arc light invariably shining.

(3) Gloria under Moon-like Neon Lights

Twenty-five-year-old Anthony is utterly fascinated by his future wife, Gloria, at the age of twenty-two, in the section titled "Signlight and Moonlight." How does signlight, light on billboards and buildings, influence him? Anthony's ardor and lust markedly increase when he succeeds in going out from a party place with Gloria, and explores the area in the vicinity of Times Square for the first time alone with her. Despite the fact that it was one January night, a warm breeze "brought to Anthony "a vision of an unhoped-for hyacinthine spring"; and, their taxi slid over a road like "a boat on a labyrinthine ocean" (BD 517). Warmth of the winter night, reflects that Anthony's heart is heating up. The rendition of the taxi on a road of a metropolis

reflects that Anthony's imagination pictures that he has set out on adventure. The flourishing locutions standing for his burning ardor, combined to the expressions, "illusion" and "illusive," reproduce an illusion that Anthony sees in his mind (BD 517).

Anthony kisses Gloria and then sees her face:

pale under the wisps and patches of light that trailed in like moonshine through a foliage. [...]. No love was there [in Gloria's face], surely; nor the imprint of any love. Her beauty was cool as this damp breeze, as the moist softness of her own lips. (BD 517-18)

Colorful neon signs along the street of Rialto compared to moonlight illuminates Gloria and also Anthony through a window of the taxi. Anthony feels moonshine through foliage when he sees some of the neon lights come into the taxi, neon lights that are cut into small pieces by poles of street lamps, people walking the street, and whatever is intruding itself between neon lights and the taxi passing them. Anthony is also impassioned with the following two sensuous things: one is the warm damp breeze that caressed him before he got into the taxi; and the other is Gloria's sweet moist lips he has just kissed. In his illusion, he is irresistibly attracted by lovely Gloria inasmuch as he understands her emotionless countenance as an expression of serenity and calm opposite his exultation. He appreciates her cool beauty. This Gloria becomes the original image of the beauty that is to linger in his memory. In his own illusion, he can avoid thinking about her unresponsiveness towards his love and her excessive self-concentration which, in the early stage of their love, comes up as lovely coldness rather than unsympathetic demeanor.

Anthony needs a new moon integrated with the romantic image of the real moon in the constantly shining artificial lights in order to eternize this Gloria of polished beauty in his heart.

How can Anthony mix up the natural and the artificial so unforcedly? It is because Anthony, a young New Yorker in the early twentieth century, is totally attracted to magnificence of artificial lights in Rialto. It is also because Anthony, a theatergoer, enjoys being deceived by an artificial set and decoration of a theater. With such a character, Fitzgerald offers a new moon for the new age much brighter and therefore more attractive than the real moon.

III. The Moon less Bright than Moon-like Artificial Lights

Once Anthony leaves the never-sleeping Rialto of New York garishly bright with numerous artificial lights, the real moon begins to stimulate his imagination for love. From the fall of 1917 to 1918, for about a year from his twenty-nine to thirty, he spends in the South camps for World War I. The chapter about this period focuses more on drills Anthony receives in the camp than on his love affair with Dot, a nineteen-year-old plain girl,³ who lives near the camp. A matter of vital importance for Anthony is whether he will remember a sense of elation at love, and enliven his imagination which ran away with him while being spiritually enslaved by Gloria, he believes, for almost four years of their marriage, a sickening history of squabbles.

Every night, Anthony gets out of the camp to see Dot. One night, "the moon came slanting suddenly through the vines and turned the girl's [Dot's] face to the color of white roses" (*BD* 695). He associates whiteness of Dot's face illuminated by the moon to that of Gloria five years ago. Moonshine through foliage reminds Anthony of the small spots of the neon lights illuminating Gloria's white face. Anthony greatly values Gloria's physical appearance. What he really needs now is something with a surface appeal that enables him to pretend as if he was with the tempting Gloria of the most gorgeous in his memory.

It leads him back to the splendid illusion of youth. Anthony is inclined to supplant the reality with the other, in order to get into his own comfortable memories. Anthony romanticized the real Dot in the moon, by veiling it with the vivid original image of beauty in the artificial lights. The real Gloria with the fake moon prevails against the fake Gloria with the real moon. Here in this scene, the importance of the original moon for Anthony remarkably diminishes. Instead, that of the artificial moon rises up. Five years ago, at twenty-five, he needed the real moon to feel the arc light attractive; but now, at twenty-nine, the age when his youthful illusion is nearly fading out. He needs to remember artificial lights, to wake romantic feeling. In his mind, the artificial combined with the original image of beauty has taken the place of the real moon. The real moon of weak light cannot long sustain his romantic feeling, in difference with the strong and stable neon lights: his illusion gets broken by the very small factor of Dot's whisper.

When Anthony insinuates that he wants to break up with Dot, as he did not enjoy being with Dot herself actually, the moon starts to revive the love affair. Her blaming Anthony for leaving does not relight his passion for her but only results in inviting his compassion. The love affair suddenly lies heavily upon him. To calm her, Anthony, from his compassion, promises that he will regard her will to leave there with him when he moves to the other camp in Mississippi. Then, Dot "let him support her weight while the moon, at its perennial labor of covering the bad complexion of the world, showered its illicit honey over the drowsy street" (*BD* 709). The moon, with romantic light provoking sugariness of the fleeting amorous liaison, covers dismals of Anthony who came to the camp to escape from the wearisome married life and now is getting away from the perplexity of the liaison. The moonlight conceals their trouble only for a

moment, however hard it labors. The disclosure of the insufficiency of the real moon diminishes the importance of the real moon, and quietly sets artificial moons above it.

IV. Anthony's Age and Moonlight

Catastrophic collisions of two themes⁴ and characters⁵ in *The Beautiful and Damned* make the novel indecisive, cooperating with its loose structure and too many discursive episodes, as Bruccoli analyzes (*Some Sort* 152-55). It makes difficult to determine the relationship between Anthony and moons, but one thing for certain is that Anthony's imagination romps most freely with the artificial moonlight. The real moonlight indirectly pouring for Anthony and the one in places other than New York also stimulates him, but only for a short time.

In addition to the three kinds of shining moons above, Anthony's age is vital to define his relationship with moons. It explains why the moon around the camp did not show magical power to sustain his imagination. At that time, he was almost thirty, the ominous age for him. By countdowning to thirty and identifying himself with the coming age, as Curnutt argues, Anthony of "age phobia" ends the youthful splendor early (95). Only drinking is left for Anthony beyond the age of thirty, as a means of getting away from the reality. On one night Anthony at the age of thirty-three gets ignored by his former friends, and gets defeated by his ex-rival for Gloria. Despair overcomes sobered-up Anthony. He "looked up to where the moon was anchored in mid-sky, shedding light down into Claremont Avenue as into the bottom of a deep and uncharted abyss" (*BD* 789; emphasis added). A lack of strength to decide to stop dissipation to forget the harsh reality of getting older caused the Patches to move to one of the apartments on Claremont Avenue with the cheapest rent since their married life began. The

appalling avenue lighted by the scaring moon seems like an abyss for Anthony in despair. The subjectivity of the view is suggested by the conjunction, "as," which makes the sentence subjective. What is notable here is that the moon appears with the conjunction which changes the reality into a personal illusion. Through a subjective way of expressing the avenue, readers would feel what Anthony feels; for the words and expressions in this scene show Anthony's reality, in other words, his illusion that reflects his feelings and his condition of mind. The Claremont Avenue standing for his shrinking economy hints that his spiritual life has also shrunk. The fastened moon in mid-sky is expressed as if it were a prop in a theater, which deprives the real moon of the reality, and foregrounds the reality of artificial moons supporting Anthony's comfortable illusion on the other side of the harsh reality. Unlike tender moons which dissolves the border between the real world and his illusionary world, the "anchored" moon seems to demarcate the two worlds, and make Anthony fasten on to the reality. The moon in New York for Anthony over thirty won't offer him a comfortable illusion which he needs; instead, it gives him the converse, a terrifying delusion.⁶ This moon presents a great contrast to artificial moons that once Anthony in his twenties dreamt of. The loose structured novel clarifies the contrast between the real moon and artificial moons, only when many conditions are attached.

V. Artificial Lights for an Eternal Splendor of Youth

Most critics agree that *The Beautiful and Damned* describes the process of Anthony's mental corruption. It is accounted for by his inner stress out of his morbid dread of aging, his emotional death, for his belief that aging deprives him of the youthful splendor, his supreme happiness and all that he wants in his life. His mind has been tearing apart between the two opposite

choices: accepting or rejecting the truth that he is aging. Both choices spoil him, though: because of his knowledge of being fated to lose the youthful splendor, he resigns himself to aging, and becomes languid; and persistence to youth intensifies his desperateness for eternally being young by flying into his illusionary world. He tends to escape to his illusion by his imagination and alcohol. In his twenties before his marriage, he uses his imagination to enrich his illusionary world. After marriage, he gets old, and his imagination does not work well. As a result, by thirty, he has totally succumbed to burnout and flaccidity and indulged himself in sprees and alcohol to forget the distress of aging, as Curnutt points out. From his lonely boyhood, he has been almost breaking in his mental condition. The method he learnt to deal with the loneliness is to soak himself in his illusory world. Anthony, therefore, has a streak of disintegration: one Anthony sees the reality; and out of the shock to face the reality, another Anthony lives in his illusion.

Anthony's disintegration can be recognized in his view of New York. He is obviously attracted by New York, and finds a romantic possibility in it, yet, he speaks in dispraise of New York itself. What he really loves is the city with artificial lights on after dusk. He pretends to know that New York is an artificial spectacle, which is lacquered over its inside emptiness, like a theater set splendid in front but not the same on its back. He thinks that the city is "a mountebank" apt to deceive people into believing that it is a romantic metropolis, but it holds the image in his mind only for a moment (*BD* 544). It means that it fails for him in the daytime but succeeds in the night, his favorite hours for soaking himself in his illusion. He loves nighttime so much that he feels it to be short, even as a moment, in exaggeration. Artificial lights magically change an amusement park of the Palisades over the Hudson:

Across the water were the Palisades, crowned by the ugly framework of the amusement park—yet soon it would be dusk and those same iron cobwebs would be a glory against the heavens, an enchanted palace set over the smooth radiance of a tropical canal. (*BD* 760)

At dusk in the late spring of 1921, thirty-three-year-old Anthony, from his apartment in Manhattan, imagines that the daytime unbeautiful amusement park becomes a shimmering palace of Arabian Nights in the nighttime with bright artificial lights blazing. Anthony sees a power of artificial lights which magically transfigure the spider-like framework with bulbs into some radiant loops of gold. He understands that artificial lights are doing the trick, yet he is irresistibly attracted to the delusive view. He adores things in the most resplendent moment, even though they are actually ugly or empty at the core. It does not matter at all for him, who knows how to cover its faults up with his imagination. Something really magnificent to the core is unnecessary for him to feel romantic, as his attitude toward love affairs exemplifies.

Anthony postulates that one enjoys one's life best in one's twenties. He is acutely aware that a romantic possibility for youth is vanishing year by year, and he could not vanquish his dread of aging. Trying to dismiss the dread from his mind, he needs to maintain his illusion unbroken and soak himself there. He finds artificial lights powerfully gulf him into a swirl of excitement so as to brighten his illusion permanently. This is the reason why he prefers artificial moons to the real moon continually waxing and waning and less bright than them. They enable him to keep the most attractive moment intact in his mind as if it were freshly placed there. Gloria's most attractive face in the neon lights is preserved in his memory as an example of beauty. A memory of beauty in artificial lights can be saved from

perishing in his mind.

Conclusion

Against Anthony's expectation as for the artificial moons of the artificial lights, we cannot ignore the fact that each incandescent bulb has a limited life span. It means that as soon as he valued the arc light, he was destined to shortly collapse. Anthony carelessly predetermines to collapse his illusion, being too far to notice that although the real moon disappears from the sky once a month, it does not die, actually. Incandescent bulbs cannot be revitalized once they get broken, although the moon regenerates once a month after it seems dead when it is seen from the earth. Anthony ignores it. The episode of the arc light implies that Anthony will not sustain the youthful splendor, from the very beginning of the novel.

It is very sad for Anthony to be attracted by the artificial moon, although it is natural for him of a romantic New Yorker in the early twentieth century. He is fascinated with growing New York, full of the artificial. The artificiality in his mind foretells that his illusion is to fade out and the romantic possibility is to recede as he is aging. *The Beautiful and Damned* is a record of Anthony's almost eight years, approaching breakdown. An artificial light as a supplanter for the real moon is used ironically in *The Beautiful and Damned*, enough to prove that Fitzgerald shows attained skill to use the moon, the new moon though, as an effective motif to imprint on readers' subconscious part of mind the dread and agony of his hero craving for youth but only finding himself losing it. The theme of melancholy of losing youth depressingly lies beneath the young exultation of the hero, as the relationship between the hero and moons unveils.

Notes

- 1 Fitzgerald's four letters to his daughter in which he praised Keats and

recommended her to read him vouch that Fitzgerald admired Keats (Brucoli, *F. Scott Fitzgerald* 341-42, 357-58, 456-57, 460-61). A considerable influence of Keats' on Fitzgerald is obvious; for example, while working on *The Beautiful and Damned*, Fitzgerald called it "The Beautiful Lady without Mercy", suggesting Keats' poem, "La Belle Dame sans Merci" (Brucoli, *Some Sort* 143).

- 2 Hereafter, a reference to *The Beautiful and Damned* will be made with the abbreviation, *BD*.
- 3 When Anthony first saw Gloria at the age of twenty two, he thought that she was "scarcely eighteen" (*BD* 485). Dot's age suggests that Anthony recognizes a similarity between the two, and will impose Gloria at that time upon Dot in order to start over the romance with Gloria, in his imagination.
- 4 The themes of a revolt against the convention and the meaninglessness of life tend to "neutralize" each other (Miller 69).
- 5 Stern points out a flaw demonstrating Anthony and Gloria not as opposites but as a team (*Golden* 137-38).
- 6 This is the first time for the moon to assert its threatening influence on Anthony, although long before this scene, just after their marriage, the moon for Gloria appears as a threatener for being herself in her married life. As Fryer argues, Gloria would sense that her self is in a crisis in the life with Anthony who has no idea of giving her security, other than adoring her as "a beautiful object" (32) and possessing her. In one early morning, she instinctively wants the sunlight, a reminder of her secure childhood, when her female sex had not determined the limit of her identity yet, when she was wholly protected without feeling any sense of possession. Sunlight is associated with happiness of Gloria's childhood. It differs from Anthony's case. He gets oppressed in sunlight.

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