What words should the first man on the moon utter that will ring through the ages?

“What hath God wrought.”

“Watson, come here—I need you.”

“Dr. Livingstone, I presume?”

“Well, I made it.”

“Er...ah...well, let’s see now.”
Le Mot Juste for the Moon
by William H. Honan

We, the human race, hereby request that the first man on the moon, destined to speak on our behalf, pause for a moment and give some consideration to what he intends to say.

When Neil H. Armstrong, a blond, blue-eyed, thirty-eight-year-old civilian astronaut from Wapakoneta, Ohio, steps out of the lunar landing module this summer and plants his size eleven space boot on the surface of the moon, the event will eclipse in historic importance the landing of Christopher Columbus in the New World. Commander Armstrong's step will not immediately affect the nature or quality of life on earth, of course (neither did Columbus'), but it will mark the departure point of a fantastic new adventure in the saga of man. For that step onto the moon will signal a readiness to travel throughout the solar system, even the universe—in flights that will lead not merely to new worlds, new substances, new conceptions about the nature of matter and of life itself, but it can scarcely be doubted, to contact with new beings as well. Moreover, Armstrong's will be the first such epic stride to be recorded in detail by the microphone and the television camera. Future generations will be able to relive all that was said and done at that moment as never before in the history of exploration. The stupendous magnitude and unprecedented visibility of what Commander Armstrong is about to do, therefore, combine to pose the question: when the astronaut takes that first step on the moon, what should he say?

At the great moments of discovery and invention in the past, men have risen, or stumbled, to the occasion with everything from instant eloquence to stupefied silence. But whatever they have said, or left unsaid, has been handed down to posterity. It is not unreasonably noted, for example, by a sailor who kept the logbook during Columbus' first voyage to the New World, that it was not the Admiral and commander of the expedition who first set eyes on the New World, but a lookout aboard the Pinta named Rodrigo de Triana who drew the watch early on the morning of October 12, 1492. At approximately two a.m., de Triana saw a white sand cliff gleaming in the moonlight and sang out: "Tierra! Tierra!" ("Land! Land!"). The captain of the Pinta, Martín Alonso Pinzón, rushed up on deck, confirmed the sighting, and fired a gun as a signal to Columbus, aboard the flagship Santa María which lay behind. The Pinta then permitted the Santa María to overtake her, and, as she did so, Columbus, too, must have seen land for he called across to Pinzón: "Señor Martín Alonso, you have found land! I give you five thousand maravedis as a present." The Pinta's logbook noted that when Columbus led a small party ashore the next morning, he knelt on the beach to offer prayers of thanks and then rose and gave the island the name San Salvador (Holy Savior).

After Magellan had circumnavigated the globe in 1522, his fleet cast anchor off the quay of Seville and, according to a crewman, "discharged all our artillery." Then the ragged sailors went, "in shirts and barefoot, each holding a candle," to offer thanks at the shrines of Santa María de la Victoria and Santa María de l'Antigua. When Marco Polo met the great Kublai Khan in China he "made obeisance with the utmost humility." The Khan was flattered and so entertained him "with good cheer." When the Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama sighted the New World—if we are to believe Meyerbeer's L'Africaine—he burst into song, twittering: "Ooooh! Pa-aa-ra-di-so!" Captain Cook was tongue-tied when he came upon Tahiti; evidently he just ogled at the girls. And Commodore Perry, on stepping ashore in Japan, also kept his thoughts to himself but had a Marine band play "Hail! Columbia!," which caused the samurai warriors standing alongside their troops to scowl ferociously. Stanley, of course, said, "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" when he found the famous British explorer starved almost to the point of death in Ujiji after having vainly sought the headwaters of the Nile. Livingstone's reply—less well-known, although not bad for keeping his sangfroid under the circumstances—was "Yes." Admiral Peary, after he discovered the North Pole, wrote home: "Northern trip entirely satisfactory." Lindbergh, after flying the Atlantic and landing in Paris, peered out of his cockpit groggily and said, with a faint smile, "Well, I made it." He was hauled off to be formally greeted by the American Ambassador and several French dignitaries. "Thank you," he told them. "I am awfully happy." And then, according to a reporter who was standing nearby, "his fatigue could be fought off no longer and he seemed to go to sleep standing there on his feet." When Admiral Byrd flew over the South Pole two years later in his boxy Ford trimotor monoplane, he must have come under Lindbergh's spell because the first words he radioed home were: "Well, it's done." And Sir Edmund Hillary, when returned to his base camp from the summit of Mount Everest, "shouted the good news," according to his own account, "in rough New Zealand slang."

Ever since the cry "Eureka!" rang out from the baths at Syracuse when Archimedes figured out the principle of flotation, scientists and inventors have also contributed to the literature of famous first words. A good many, no doubt, have merely exclaimed in their laboratories or workshops, "Aha!" or "By jove!", yet others have been a great deal more self-conscious about what they were doing and recognized that classy language might add luster to their accomplishments. One so worldly wise was Samuel F. B. Morse, the American painter who began tinkering with electromagnets in the early 1840's and invented the telegraph. When Morse was later granted an appropriation by Congress to set up the first large-scale test of his invention, between the Supreme Court chamber in Washington and a hotel room in Baltimore some sixty miles away, he invited Annie Ellsworth, the bright and attractive daughter of the U.S. Commissioner of Patents, to think up a suitably lofty first message for him to send. Miss Ellsworth suggested a Biblical quotation—"What hath God wrought!"—and when the wire was finally strung and all preparations ready, Morse tapped it out letter by letter and so into history as the world's first intercity telegram.

Alexander Graham Bell, the Scottish-American professor of vocal physiology who invented the telephone a generation later, was much impressed by Morse's first message. When (Continued on page 56)
Fifty Helpful Hints

Professor Hubert H. Humphrey — May the conflicts and troubles of man never find a home here. May the moon be a symbol of peace and cooperation among the nations of earth.

Vladimir Nabokov — You want a lump in (the astronaut's) throat to obstruct the wisecrack.

William Bernbach (Chairman of the Board of Doyle Dane Bernbach) — 1) This neighborhood is never going to be the same again. 2) Nice place to visit, but I wouldn't want to live here. 3) I'm proud of this but I would rather be the man who made peace on earth. And 4) Now the corruption starts.

Sun Ra (the space-age jazz poet) — Reality has touched against myth / Humanity can move to achieve the impossible / Because when you've achieved one impossible / the others / Come together in space like two brothers / Borrowed from the rim of the myth / Happy Space Age To You....

Keir Dullea (actor who plays the astronaut in 2001: A Space Odyssey) — I shall never lose the awe of being the first man to stand on a given spot where no man has ever trod before.

Anne Sexton — Moonsong, Womansong / I am alive at night. / I am dead in the morning, / an old vessel who used up her oil, sleek and pale boned. / No miracle / No dazzle. / I'm out of repair / but you are tall in your battle dress / and I must arrange for your journey. / I was always a virgin, / old and pitted. / Before the world was, I was. / I have been oranging and fat / carrot colored, gaped at, / allowing my cracked o's to drop on the sea / near Venice and Mombasa. / Over Maine I have rested. / I have fallen like a jet into the Pacific. / I have committed perjury over Japan. / I have dangled my pendulum, / my fat bag, my gold, gold / blinkedy light / over you all. / So if you must inquire, do so. / After all I am not artificial. / I look long upon you, / love-belied and empty, / flipping my endless display / for you, my cold, cold / cover-all man. / You need only request / and I will grant it. / It is virtually guaranteed / that you will walk into me like a barracks. / So come cruising, come cruising, / you of the blast off, / you of the bastion, / you of the scheme. / I will shut my fat eye down / headquarters of an area / house of a dream.

Marianne Moore — Just got here and I have to look around / (I'm quoting Harry Belafonte) / Sit down. I can't sit down. I've just got to Heaven and I've got to look around.

Leonard Nimoy (plays Spock in Star Trek) — I'd say to earth, from here you are a peaceful, beautiful ball and I only wish everyone could see it with that perspective and unity.

Lawrence Ferlinghetti — We Roman emperors of space have hereby proved that heaven doesn't exist and that the only god is consciousness itself.

E. H. Mann Sr. (Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Prohibition National Committee) — Be assured, people of earth, we shall not corrupt the moon with beverage alcohol, with tobacco's poisons or with other of man's unfortunate concoctions. Rather, we shall keep this area of God's universe pure and free from the ugliness and the devastation of the sinful excesses of humankind.

Father Malcolm Boyd — I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. All right, you guys, whoever you are standing behind that rock over there, come out with your hands up!

Robert Graves — (I suggest a tacitful propitiation of the Moon Goddess, thus averting national lunacy.) Forgive the intrusion: Ma'am. Don't smile so bitter / At good Yanks tidying up your Spumítk litter.

Melvin Belli — Since there is a dispute over whether Columbus brought it or got it from the Indians the last time a New World was discovered, our astronauts should spare future moon historians any doubt by saying, immediately upon landing, "Gentlemen, our negative Wasserman cards!"

Harold O'Neill (President, American Sunbathing Association) — I proclaim this a wonderful spot where the bare facts of life shall not be loused up with earthly conventions. Moon-life shall be sans clothing, thus eliminating the need for vacation wardrobes... an important weight factor when considering space travel.

Stanley Kunitz — The Flight of Apollo: Earth was my home, but even there I was a stranger. This mineral crust. I walk like a swimmer. What titanic bombardments in those old astral wars! I know what I know: I shall never escape from strangeness or complete my jour-
ne. Think of me as nostalgic, afraid, exalted. I am your man on the moon, a speak of megalomania, restless for the leap towards island universes pulsing beyond where the constellations set. Infinite space overwhelps the human heart, but in the middle of nowhere life inexorably calls to life. Forward my call to Mars. What news from the Great Spiral Nebula in Andromeda and the Magellanic Clouds?


*Senator George McGovern—* I raise the Flag of the United Nations to claim this planet for all mankind and to signal a new era of understanding and cooperation among nations — both on the Moon and on Earth.

*Timothy Leary—* 1) The CIA really blew it again. How did all those barefoot, long-haired, smiling-eyed kids get up here ahead of us? 2) Eldridge Cleaver, you are under arrest for trespassing on a military reservation.

*Joseph Heller—* I'd like to hear nothing; the chances are I won't be listening. I'm more interested in what Joe Namath or George Sauer has to say about anything, and I hope the moon landing doesn't take place during a Jet football game and interrupt the telecast. One of my favorite statements of recent times, in fact, came from George Sauer. He was talking about a Baltimore player with a crew cut, and he said: "He ought to let his hair grow, he looks funny that way." I doubt if anything said about the moon landing will make more sense.

*Truman Capote—* If I were the first astronaut on the moon my first remark would be: So far so good.

*Muhammad Ali—* Bring me back a challenger, 'cause I've defeated everyone here on earth.

*Justice William O. Douglas—* I pledge that we the people of the earth will not litter, pollute and despoil the moon as we have our own planet.

*Bob Hope—* 1) Well, at least I didn't end up in Havana. 2) My God, smog! 3) I'll be darned, it's made of cheese!

*Tiny Tim—* The first thing I would like to hear him say is "Praise the Lord through Christ that we landed well and safely." Then I'd like him to describe the moon, and how it looks and feels, what the craters are like, whether there are any cities around, if there's any air to breathe. I think there are definitely beings on the moon. They will probably be people very different from us, but the astronauts should be prepared to show them the goodwill of the people of Earth. They should bring with them free gifts. Things like candies, balloons, bubble pipes, soap bars, pens, pencils, plants, even a ukelele, and, most important, the Holy Scriptures, so that we can give our new acquaintances some idea of what life is like down here. I really believe life does exist on every planet, even the suns, and before we go visiting other worlds, we should be sure we are ready to make the people we find waiting there our friends.

*Congressman Edward I. Koch (Representative of Manhattan's "Sill-Stocking" 17th Congressional District)—* I proclaim the moon an international scientific laboratory, for all men of all nations to use peacefully in their quest for a deeper understanding of the many worlds which are theirs.

*Gwendolyn Brooks (poetess who won Pulitzer Prize in 1950; her volume In the Mecca was nominated for National Book Award last year)—* Here there shall be peace and love.

*David Sloan—* We have realized an ancient dream, and it is rock and dust; now we must look back to earth, imagine what it ought to be, and hope that dream turns out better.

*Theodore Weiss—* 1) Moon that we have for thousands of years looked up to, how we help to see the earth in its true light, as whole and one. 2) The moon having shone on the earth till now, by way of its light we, risen also, come to pay it homage, the blessing of that light reflected in us.

*Joshua Stavitt (age five, son of above poet)—* Hi there, nobody! (Continued on page 138)
Bell realized he was on the verge of having his gadget operational, therefore, he began to declaim Shakespeare into it—usually the "To be or not to be" soliloquy from _Hamlet_—in testing an improvement or a new piece of equipment. On March 10, 1876, Bell and his assistant Thomas Watson strolled off to their receiving station in a room just outside the laboratory and Bell prepared to receive. Just then Bell accidentally sloshed battery acid over his clothes and cried out anxiously: "Watson, come here—I need you!" Watson heard him over the telephone! And came running. Bell, in his joy at Watson's having heard his summons, forgot about the acid spreading over his clothes and the two men took turns rhapsodically declaiming pithy quotations and finally "God save the Queen!" over the world's first telephone. When Bell demonstrated his invention at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition later that year, and in subsequent trials, he boominously recited "To be or not to be..." But telephonic Shakespeare made little impression on the public; the rhetoric of accident and chance remark seemed more relevant to that increasingly technology-conscious era. Accordingly, on January 25, 1915, when Bell was called upon to inaugurate the opening of the first transcontinental telephone line, nothing would do but to have Bell in New York tell Watson in San Francisco, "Watson, come here—I need you!"

Unfortunately, no one knows what Thomas A. Edison said when he invented the electric light bulb, but in 1877 when he tested his first crude phonograph he simply bellowed a utilitarian sentence into the instrument, and then waited breathlessly for it to replay a whisper and warbling "Ha-ha-oo-oo." A quarter of a century later, in 1901, when Guglielmo Marconi was pecking out the world's first transatlantic radio signal, it surprised no one that he had selected to send—not a glittering _terza rima_ from the immortal Dante but merely the letter "S" in Morse code, repeated over and over again until the team at St. Johns, Newfoundland, finally picked up a clear "dit"—very good. "Negative...very good. I feel fine. Wally...Chute is out. Beautiful chute. Chute looks good. Chute looks very good."

The newspapers ballyhooed Glenn's spatial effusions; radio and TV commentators played and replayed the tapes, yet now that all the patriotic beating of breasts is over, with, it seems clear that whatever else he may have added to the Saga of Man, John Glenn filled the first chapter in the Book of Space with five hours of unrelieved drivel—much of it on a par with the McGuffey Reader ("I see the ball. The ball is red"). If the transcript of Glenn's flight was a warning that the first man in space might be some kind of a linguistic throwback, proof came the following year during the flight of Major Leroy Gordon ("Gordo") Cooper Jr. in Faith 7. Cooper's flight was seven times as long as Glenn's and it contained roughly seven times as much space or expression of the sensations of a space traveler, and about seven times as much of the sort of Smilin' Jack jargon ("Rog. I read you loud and clear. Affirmative...Negative...Over") that schoolchildren had already begun to pick up from Glenn. A few phrases of particular significance, however, cropped up in the colloquy between the astronaut in space and Commander Walter M. Schirra Jr. who served as the communications officer on the ground. As the moment Cooper was successfully injected into orbit, Schirra told him, "You're right smack dab in the middle of the plot." Smack dab? No American had used such an expression, except in jest, for more than a generation. And then, hours later, when Cooper landed Faith 7 only seven thousand yards from the aircraft carrier _Kearsarge_—a bull's-eye for a vehicle reentering from space—he exclaimed joyously that he had come down "right on the old bazoo"! Had Cooper said "right on the money" it would have sounded at least vaguely contemporary. Even "right on the old gasola"—a World War II expression—would have called less attention to itself. But bazoo? That sounded more like Granny on _The Beverly Hillbillies_ than a daring young man flashing around the globe at 17,000 miles per hour.

And Granny was not far from the mark. Both "smack dab" and "old bazoo" came into vogue at the turn of the century through the popular novels of Will N. Harben, a now completely forgotten literary artist who specialized in tales of small-town life in northern Georgia. Harben had an absolute genius—unrived before or since—for phony colloquialism. He could cram more "By cracky," "Tarnations," "Looky here," "Gee whillikins" and "Jumpin' Jehoshaphats" on a page than Shakespeare could images or Alexander Pope rhymes. And the public ate it up. So successful, in fact, was Harben that it is almost impossible for present-day philologists to determine whether anyone ever really said "Looky here" or "Gee whillikins" before Harben popularized such expressions in his novels, claiming, of course, that the people down in northern Georgia really talked that way. In any case, it now appears that Harben was a sort of Robert Goddard of the space program. Both "smack dab" and "bazoo" appear in Harben's novel _Abner Daniel_—a tale about a kindly old Georgian Mr. Chips—published in 1902. "A railroad is goin' to be run from Blue Lick Junction to Darley," says one of Harben's characters. "It'll be started inside of the next year an' I'll run smack dab through my property." Later on, another character says, "Don't shoot off yore bazoo on one side or o' other." The book is a veritable glossary of space terms. As the American moon program topped the feats of Glenn and Cooper, new astronauts with equally curious manners of speech became known to the public. For instance, on September 12, 1966, as Commander Charles Conrad Jr. aboard Gemini 11 was closing his range to an Agena rocket in order to perform a docking maneuver, he said: "Whoop-de-doo!" In 1968, when Captain Schirra was maneuvering his Apollo 7, he cried: (Continued on page 139)
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(Continued from page 85) Saturday
Review, Max Beerbohm, is still
interesting to read but not because one
is curious about their conclusions on
plays and playwrights who have been
forgotten for half a century.

After Mr. Crowther got wise to the
tale of fresh spad—his dis-
missal of L’Avventura as a preten-
sious bore provoked a massive back-
lash of testy letters that changed
his mind—I found I agreed with
his valuations of foreign films more
often than with those of Pauline Kael
—and even on American movies, Mr.
C’s newly acquired hedginess toward
imports being paralleled by cautious
sprouts of skepticism about Holly-
wood. (In admirable contrast to Mr.
C, the eternal philistine, forever in-
secure and so a pushover for whatever
“trends” are pushing hardest, Miss K
refuses to be bullied by high-
brow fashion, reacting against the
European “art” film and in favor of
our domestic commercial product;
okay but she overdoes it; and she for-
gets that sometimes a fashionable
trend is justified.) But I continued to
skim Mr. C’s clotted journalisms,
you couldn’t read it, getting from it
what I had before our tastes agreed,
zero; and I continued to enjoy Miss
K’s reviews. Her judgments were
not wrongheaded but always clear-
ly reasoned. I found her roundabout
trip to the wrong terminus more edu-
cational than Mr. C’s shuttle service
to the right station.

Actually, Mr. C was a reviewer, not
a critic. The latter is interested in
what he thinks of a work, the former
in what his readers will think of it.
A reviewer performs a humble but
useful service, like a racecarer tout,
as one town or a market analyst, and
like them, he has a short memory as
against the critic’s, or the economist’s, which
extends over decades, periods, even
centuries. The horses or plays or
books or movies or stocks of the mo-
moment are his standard of comparison.

When a reviewer says, to cite some
recent ads in the Times, that a movie is
“great” (Lila Smith, Cosmopolitan)
or “an absolute must—see” (Newday)
or “Stunning!” (Glamor) or “like a
dipperful of fresh spring water”
(Howard Thompson, New York
Times) or “a yummy movie—movie”
(Judge Crist, New World Review),
he, she or it means no more than that
it is great or yummy or dipper-fresh
compared to the current crop; which
may be correct.

Critic—critics like me or John Simon
are accused of “not liking movies,”
which is also seasonal—speaking.
I disliked most of the new
releases I saw while I was reviewing
for Esquire from 1960 to 1966. But
this was because I have for so long
had such a passion for movies—
“like” is too mild—that I ask a lot
from the experience. My comparisons
are not with the relative junkiness of
one as against another item in the
same genre or the same junk that
flourishes annually this year and is
forgotten next. My idea of cinema is
more extensive, going back to the
sound renaissance that began fifteen
years ago and, in extreme cases like
comedy, to the Keaton-Chaplin-Sen-
nen period.

Like its older sisters, cinema has
in its history a few great innovators,
a larger number of talented followers
(“school of” or “minor” but they are
essential to the life of the medium,
ecologically—also enjoyable in their
own special ways) and an enormously
greater quantity of energetic, un-
talented hacks who produce the bulk
of any period’s works. One may see
by walking through the remoter gal-
leries of any large art museum. The
critic’s job is to determine differen-
ties between these three categories; with
reasons. #

Russell Baker—I hereby declare this
moon open for pollution.
Yetta Broustein — 1968 “Jewish
Mother” candidate for President—
Miami Beach, it isn’t.
Peter De Vries—It’s a good time for
non-verbal communication. Well,
I once said, when somebody asked me
if I thought we were going to the
moon, of course we should. We
were put on this earth for a purpose.
Norman Roven (former Chairman
of the Board of Ted Bates & Company)—
You now have proof positive that
the moon isn’t made of green cheese.
R. Buckminster Fuller—Wish you
were here.

Secretary-General U Thant—When
I greeted Colonel Frank Borman,
commander of Apollo 8, at U.N.

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headquarters on the 16th of January, 1969, he responded by saying: ‘We
saw the earth the size of a quarter and we recognized then that there
really is one world. We are all brothers.’
So I would like to add that.astron-
ut to land on the moon to remind us
again of this fact so that we may all
have a new sense of perspective to
enable us, in the language of the
Charter of the United Nations, to
practice tolerance and live together
in peace with one another as good
neighbors.
Lowell Thomas—Now see who’s the
man on the moon!
Kurt Vonnegut Jr.—Was this the
face that launched a thousand ships?
Sandra Hochman (who wrote Love-
letters from Asia) asked: ‘What’s the
relation to the moon: Peace, Shalom,
Salaam, Pacha, Paix, Heiwa, P’ing,
Amami! Moon you have once been
the ancient goddess! All men lived un-
der your double harness! Now we
live to touch your rim! You, ancient
guardian of our dreaming life! You
authentic teacher in the matter of our
dreaming mind! And you are real as I
have always known it to be. You are
real! Peace, Shalom, Salaam, Pacha,
Paix, Heiwa, P’ing, Amami.
LE MOT JUSTE FOR THE MOON
(Continued from page 56) ‘Rhubab-
dub-doo-doo!’ And five months later,
when Russell L. Schweickart stepped
out on the ‘front porch’ of Apollo 9
and became the first self-contained
human space craft, he was asked by a
fellow astronaut to look toward the
TV cameras and say something.
Schweickart mugged, and remarked:
‘Hello, dear.’ These expressions also,
it can scarcely be doubted, originated
in the unexpectedly influential works
of Will N. Harben.
What is disturbing about all this is
not that our space rhetoric appears
to have been informed by a huck
Victorian novelist—that comes as a
jump to our national pride—but that
the language the astronauts use is
resolutely, almost defiantly, un-
communicating. Even in those few
hours they have bobbed around up
there, have they managed to convey
what space really looks like or feels
like. All they ever have us is that
it is “beautiful.” They use that word,
like a Boy Scout jackknife, for every
imaginable purpose.
As with so much else about orbital
space flight, it was Colonel John H.
Glenn Jr. who conducted the first ex-
periments with the word “beautiful.”
It was during that maiden orbit of the
earth in 1962 when Glenn peeped out
the window of Friendship 7 to take a
look at the cloud-dappled state of Florida
that he exclaimed, “It’s a beautiful sight!”
Three months later, as Captain Scott
Carpenter was flying the U.S. second
orbital mission, he tried to de-
scribe the succession of sunrises and
sunsets that he saw. “Boy!” Carpen-
ter said, “They are more beautiful
than anything I have ever seen in
earth!” And five months after that,
Captain Schirra was making six rev-
olutions of the earth: “I hate space-
craft handle!” asked Ground
If the peninsula of Florida, the effects
of sunlight and the performance of
American spacecrafts were all “beautiful,” so indeed was space itself.
This discovery was made on
March 23, 1965 when the late Major
Virgil I. (“Gus”) Grissom and Lieu-
tenant Commander John W. Young
were making the first orbital maneu-
ers in space. One could almost feel
Young straining to escape the prac-
tically gravitational pull of that
word upon astronauts, only to be
drawn at last into its clutches: “You
can’t take your eyes away from the
window at first,” he radioed back to
to earth. “It is incredibly beautiful. [That,
at least, was original.] There aren’t
words in the English language to
describe it. [The first danger sig-
 nal.] It was . . . [now falling help-
lessly] bee-putiful!”
The space journey of Majors
James McDivitt and Edward H.
White in June, 1965, aboard Gemini
4 is memorable not only because it
was their first space walk, but because it added a new
word to the astronaut’s lexicon. The new term emerged, like many a great
leap of the imagination, casually and
unheralded. It popped out of
McDivitt’s mouth as his Gemini capsule
was separating from its booster. Mc-
Divitt happened to turn around just
at that moment and saw the gleam-
ingness of the steel rocket canister
sailing away behind him—E’en like
the passage of an angel’s tear! That
takes me away to the clear ether silently.
Unquestionably, the scene looked
beautiful to him, yet McDivitt did not
call upon that adjective which
had been so faithful a companion of
man’s timid first steps into the great
beyond. Instead, McDivitt said: “It
looks pretty.”
That was, as Mission Control
would say, another first. A new
word was in orbit. And for months
thereafter everything that swam into
our astronauts’ ken was pronounced
“pretty.” In August, 1965, for ex-
ample, when Lieutenant Colonel
Cooper was making the first ex-
tended flight in space, he said in his
slow Oklahoma drawl: “Space is the
most beautiful thing I ever see.”
It was Commander Eugene A.
Cernan who rediscovered the beauty
of space, and thereby got the astro-
nauts back in the groove again.
On the morning of June 3, 1966,
Cernan opened the hatch of his Gemini
space craft and stepped out into the
void. “It sure is beautiful out here,
Tom,” he radioed to his copilot, Cap-
tain Thomas Stafford, turning around and looking back at the
capsule. Cernan made yet an-
other discovery: “Oh, what a beau-
tiful spacecraft!” he exclaimed at
that moment on the astronauts
were never again in space without the
word “beautiful.” They could not
talk about it like a parachute pack,
secure in the knowledge that whenever tormentated with doubts about what to say,
even when some new sight or sensation
might cause the amber light of won-
derment to flicker, “beautiful” was
always there to back up. Tom, for
example, the flight of Lieutenant
Commander Richard F. Gordon Jr.
in September, 1966. After Gordon
rendezvoused and docked his Gemini
11 capsule with an Agena rocket, he
took a space walk to inspect this un-
everly copulation of robots in the
lonely void. “How’s it look?” he was
asked from the ground. Quick as a
flash, Gordon shot back: “Beautiful
space craft! Beautiful day!” Two months later, Major Ed-
win E. Aldrin opened the hatch of
Gemini 12 in order to photograph
an eclipse of the moon—the first
eclipse witnessed in space unim-
paired by any wafting of the earth’s
crushed atmosphere. And Aldrin was
transfixed by the glorious sight, “a
beautiful view.” Last year, just after
Captain Schirra throttled up the
Apollo spacecraft’s great rocket
motor for its first manned test in
space, commanding enough thrust to
fling himself to the moon and back,
he was asked how the motor per-
formed. “Beautifully,” he said. And
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when Colonel Frank Borman and his crew were circumnavigating the moon last Christmas, Borman looked out the window at one point and glimpsed the green earth as a distant planet looming up over the barren horizon of the moon, sure enough, he reported, it was something "beautiful" to see.

Because of the fairly widespread feeling that the astronauts ought to increase their word power if they were to continue to enjoy the interest and support of their public, Julian Scheer, N.A.S.A.'s Chief Public Affairs Officer, suggested to Colonel Borman that while he and his crew were nipping around the moon last Christmas, it might not be a bad idea to broadcast to the earth something appropriate for a change. Borman took the suggestion, and, being a lay reader in the Episcopal church, hit upon the device of reciting from the Book of Genesis. He presented his plan to the rest of the crew and they, naturally, thought it a beautiful idea. Accordingly, Major William Anders began with, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth..."; Captain James A. Lovell Jr. took over at "And God called the light Day..." And Borman was the anchor man coming in with "And God called the dry land Earth..." Then Commander Thomas P. Stafford, the spacecraft's navigation officer, added "...and land..." to the Genesis while circumnavigating the moon was a little like using an advanced digital computer to work out horoscopes. Nevertheless, one could only wish those cramped and rather forlorn wayfarers on that cold Christmas Eve, and the whole public good-naturedly accepted this Scriptural lesson in the hope that it was somehow pertinent to the mission of the astronauts themselves if not, especially, anyone else. Now that they are safe at home, however, it must be said that since Borman, Lovell, and Lovell did not compose Genesis, the recitation did little to dispel the notion that the astronauts as a group tend to share, among other things, a pronounced verbal dysfunction. Indeed, it is now perfectly clear—would it be folly to deny it longer—that while the space program is poised on the brink of a truly epoch-making triumph of engineering, it is also headed for a rhetorical wreck. The principal danger is not that we will lose the life of an astronaut on the moon, but that the astronauts will murder English up there: not that we run the risk of biologically contaminating space, but that they are likely to litter the intergalactic void with gibberish and twaddle, de-spoil the written record of man's reach for the stars with the sentiments of squares, and very likely cause the keenest minds of those who may be awaiting our arrival to droop with disappointment when the astronauts present their monthly reports.

Some weeks ago, at the suggestion of this magazine, I resolved to do what I could to help Captain Scott Armstrong and his fellow moonlanders by issuing a call the world over to poets and philosophers, scientists and politicians, novelists, judges, scholars, entertainers and others of distinction, asking them: What would you like to hear the astronaut say when he takes that historic first step on the moon? All told, I received sixty-one answers to the question from such a varied lot of persons as U Thant, George Plimpton, Hubert Humphrey, Truman Capote, J. J. Lindsey, Timothy Leary, Muhammad Ali, John Kenneth Galbraith and Tiny Tim. I fervently hope the astronauts can find the time, amid the rigors of their training program, to read and contemplate their suggestions.

As may be seen on pages 54-55, not all of my respondents took the question seriously. And yet, considering the tenor of the replies, a word of caution would seem to be in order. As Captain Armstrong might not be the first to ask, a moon landing might be expected to elicit exclamations: "We finally found Judge Crater!" With airliner hijackings in the headlines, Bob Hope was prepared to say: "Well, at least I didn't end up in Havana." Mrs. Yeta Bronstein, last year's "Jewish Mother" candidate for president of the United States, imagined herself gloowering at the desolate, for-bidding moonscape through jewel-framed sunglasses and muttering: "Miami Beach, it isn't." And Art Buchwald seemed preoccupied about the sex life of the astronauts when he proposed: "Instead of reading from the Bible, they might try Proust's Complaint."

The Madison Avenue admen I quizzed were bubbling with ideas, each one more barbed than the last. The chairman of the board of Doyle Dane Bernbach, the ad agency, gave me four different ideas in the course of listening to my presentation to Volkswagen or Polaroid, ranging from anti-moon: "Nothing to visit, but I wouldn't want to live here" to pro-moon: "This neighborhood is never going to be the same again." Rossiter Reeves, former chairman of the board of Ted Bates & Company and father of the "hard sell" in radio and TV commercials, dug into his pocket and came up with: "You now have proof positive that the moon isn't made of green cheese." At least one of my experts, Reverend Thomas Keating, admitted of all efforts to be funny in outer space, no doubt recalling some of the lAME gestures the astronauts have already made. When my cable caught up with Vladimir Nabokov at the Palace Hotel in Montreux, Switzerland, the author of Lolita shot back: "You want a lump in his throat to obstruct the wisecrack."

Then there's Norman Cousins, Peter De Vries and Joseph Heller) agreed with Nabokov that the occasion called for no "perhaps even meditation" as Cousins put it, and two (Marya Mannes and General Anthony C. McAuliffe) said the ones who should bemoan us are the kibitzers. "It ought to be spontaneous," General McAuliffe told me when I reached him at his home in Washington, D.C., "just the way it was when I said 'Nutts'!" (in response to a German surrender ultimatum when Hitler was trapped at Bastogne in 1944).

Some of the most with-it intellectual on my list responded wryly. While their replies may not be of any direct assistance to Commander Armstrong, his words are all the more illuminating to the problem the astronauts may wish to cope with in whatever they decide to say on the moon: namely, that an influential segment of the American intelligentsia is profoundly alienated from the space program. They simply look on the plan to put a man on the moon as a distraction from more pressing needs here on earth. —"Moon-doggle" as Amitai Etzioni, the Columbia sociologist, has called it in the title of a recent book. And John Kenneth Galbraith might have clearly felt this way when I reached him at his ski chalet in Gstaad, Switzerland. He related, perhaps after a good swig of hot mulled gluh, "We will hafta pave the damn thing. Everything is backed by all the effort (and billions) expended by N.A.S.A. was Marshall McLuhan, who gave the undertaking the back of his hand with two replies: "The thickest mud that was ever heard dumped" and "Spitz on the lorn thing it's hot." But Peter Fuller's proposal, too, seemed disdainfully frivolous: "Wish you were here." And George Plimpton thought he ought to say, "It will be beautiful," since "that's what he's going to say anyway."

Other intellectuals were down-right suspicious of the program. When I asked W. H. Auden what he would like to hear Armstrong say, he replied first with a mischievous chuckle: "I've never done this before!" adding, "What else should he say? It would be a true statement." But when I went on to ask if he would not prefer

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something more elevating, perhaps about world peace, he grew sober. "Well, that's a little different," Auden said. "We all know that the chief reason for their going there is military, so I don't think you should ask them too much about that." Auden's fear that the moon will become a military base, whether justified or not, is widely shared. His fellow poet, Robert Graves, touched on that concern when he cabled darkly from Majore to suggesting a tactful proposition of the Moon Goddess: "Forgive the intrusion, Ma'am. Don't smile too bitter at good Yanks tiding up your nature."

Time's Leary suggested that the first astronaut on the moon would be a kind of Shore Patrol sergeant, saying: "Either from the Air Force, or from the Navy, someone will be under arrest for trespassing on a military reservation."

Going even beyond the fear of moon militarism was Father Malcolm Boyd, the Episcopal priest who wrote For You, My Son, With My Love, a letter to Yale, who was worked up about lunar colonialism. His answer was: "I baptize thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. All right, you guys, whoever you are, shut the hell up over there, come out with your hands up!"

As he explained to me: "That's been the history of missionary-oriented colonialism — that don't have self-righteousness about one's mission coupled with a great deal of pragmatism."

The political leaders, in contrast to the foregoing men of letters, tended toward idealistic statements, perhaps in the hope that a pitch for peace would steer the development of the moon in the right direction. One such suggestion was made by Senator Edward M. Kennedy, who said: "When I greeted Colonel Frank Borman . . . at U.N. headquarters . . . the Secretary-General told me through his interpreter, 'Nasif,' he responded by saying: 'We saw the earth the size of a quarter and we recognized then that there really is one world. We are all brothers.' So I would like the first astronaut to land on the moon to remind us again of this fact so that we may all have a new sense of perspective to enable us, in the language of the Charter of the United Nations, to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors.

"Humphrey" also sounded a characteristically upbeat note: "May the conflicts and troubles of man never find a home here. May the moon be a symbol of peace and cooperation among the nations of the earth." Senator George McGovern added another touch to the internationalist theme, saying that in the manner of the polar explorers a flag should be planted in the crust of the moon—the U.N. flag, naturally. "I raise the Flag of the United Nations to claim this planet for all mankind."

Dr. Barry Goldwater, one of the congressmen who supported the mission, said: "The government of New York City—they need the money most!" Another interesting notion was that of Congressman Edward Koch, who represents Mayor Lindsay's old "lilkock" congressional district in Manhattan, Congressman Koch is also a member of the House Committee on Science and Astronautics, said he would like to hear the astronaut proclaim the moon an "international scientific laboratory."

President Nixon neglected to answer my question, but William Safire, one of his chief spokesmen, during the campaign and now a Special Assistant to the President, liked the words: "Free at last, free we were, Safire told me, "a reclamation of a Martin Luther King line, applied to the emancipation of moon men." Then, just to keep things politically balanced, I got in touch with Richard Goodwin in Boston, a longtime Kennedy speech-writer. Goodwin puzzled over the question for a few days and then remarked: "I would have to be the first man myself to know what to say."

If politicians contributed some fresh thought to the exercise, not surprisingly poets (from Auden and Graves) expressed the feeling of emotional uplift that might come over the first man to realize the age-old dream of treading the lunar surface. Marianne Moore, now eighty-two and dowager queen of the lady poets of America, embroidered lyrically on a line she drew from a song by Hardy Belcher: "Just got here and I have to look around. / Sit down. I can't sit down. I just got to Heaven and I have to look around.

By contrast, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, the San Francisco beat poet and proselytizer of underground causes, wrote to me with a statement of principle that clanked as if with heavy armor: "We Roman emperors of space have hereby affirmed that heaven has come, and that the whole man is consciousness itself."

Stanley Kubrick, the New York poet who has won both a Pulitzer prize and the 1968 American Poets Fellowship Award, wrote of the moon's moon: "I could see more stars, I could see the starry firmament in his contribution: 'I shall never escape from strangeness or complete my journey.'... I wrote exactly what was written for you on the moon, a speck of megalomania, restless for the leap towards island universes far beyond where the constellations set. . . ."

"Forward my mail to Mars. What news from the Great Gull in Andromeda and the Magellanic Clouds?..." And Sun-Ra, the jazz musician who describes himself as a spiritual musician, wrote: "I have the astronomic chimp with joy; "Happy Space Age to You... ."

A lay brother who is a leading exponent of the school of poetry known as erotic mysticism, said intrigued by what men might make of the moon in his suggestion: "Bone cold. An immense Golgotha. Out of this tomb, what resurrection? Out of this dust, what weird rebirth?"

Two other poets preferred to think of the moon as a vantage point from which to contemplate the earth. Theodore Weiss, currently Professor in Creative Arts at Princeton University, who contributed his fifth volume of poetry, The Lost Day and the First, put it this way: "Moon that we have been talking of years locked up, now help us to see the earth in its true light, as whole and one."

And David Slavit, playwright and poet wrote: "This summer's On TV, I write. $9.50. I'll try to keep back to earth, imagine what it ought to be, and hope that the dream turns out better."

Slavit then included his five-year-old's idea of what he would like to hear Commander Armstrong say, and out of the mouth of the baby popped: "Hi there, nobody!"

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