

Armstrong 23 Sept. 1971

Mailer references:

Armstrong's face looked remarkable...that breakfast food face. 454
He had had the hard flat-eyed egocentric look of a kitten, eyes
hardly cracked, who will someday be a cat. ibid.

Armstrong "surrendered words about as happily as a hound
allowed meat to be pulled out of his teeth." 27

"He spoke with long pauses; he searched for words. When the
words came out, their ordinary content made the wait seem excessive."
"A shy smile. He was more wooden than young Robert Taylor,
young Don Ameche, young Randolph Scott. .. As a speaker he was all
but limp -- still it did not leave him unremarkable. Certainly the
knowledge that he was an astronaut restored his stature, yet even if he
had been a junior executive accepting an award, Armstrong would have
presented a quality which was arresting, for he was extraordinarily
remote. He was simply not like other men. He would have been more
extraordinary in fact if he had been just a salesman making a modest
inept dull little speech, for then one would have been forced to wonder
how he had ever gotten his job, how he could sell even one item, how
in fact he got out of bed in the morning. Something peculiarly innocent
or subtly sinister was in the gentle remote air. If he had been a
young boy selling subscriptions at the door, one grandmother might have
warned her grandmother never to let him in the house; another would
have commented, "That boy will go very far." He was apparently in
communion with some string in the universe others did not think to
play." 22-23.

"When Armstrong paused and looked for the next phrase he
sometimes made a sound like the open crackling of static on a pilot's
voice band with the control tower. One did not have the impression
that the static came from him so much as that he had ~~been~~ listened to
so much static in his life, suffered so much of it, that his flesh,
his cells, like it or not, were impregnated with the very cracklings
of static...Then Armstrong flashed a smile. One of his own jokes came.
His humor was pleasant and small town, not without a taste of the tart.
'And if he -- Collins -- can't think of anything else, he can
always look out the window and admire the view!'" 28-29

"We're quite sure this girl will go," he said solemnly,
pleasantly, lightly, sadly, carefully, sweetly. He was a presence in
the room, as much a presence as a man...Why should Armstrong have a soul
less divided than the unruly world of some billions of men? Indeed
contradictions lay subtly upon him ..So Armstrong seemed of all the
astronauts the man nearest to being saintly, yet there was something
as hard, small-town and used in his face as the look of a cashier
over pennies." 29-30.

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Mailer refs. (cont'd).¹

"When he stopped to think, six tired parallel lines stood out on his forehead, and his hair was very straight, small town hair-colored humorless straight, his pupils were very ~~maxed~~ small, hardly larger than buckshot, you could believe he flew seventy-eight combat missions off the Essex near Korea. He was very thin-mouthed, almost as thin and wide a mouth as Joe E. Brown, yet with no comic spirit, or better, or worse, the spirit of comedy gave orders to the mouth most of the time. Much like Wernher von Braun or President Nixon, he would smile on command. Then a very useful smile appeared -- the smile of an interesting small-town boy. He could be an angel, he could be the town's devil. Who knew? ...Aquarius decided it was not easy to trust him then -- the smile was a vehicle to remove Armstrong from the scene..At communicating he was as tight as a cramped muscle... Perversely, it was his most impressive quality, as if what was best in the man was most removed from the surface, so valuable that it must be protected by a hundred reservations, a thousand cautions.

"On the other hand, he was a professional and had learned how to contend in a practical way with the necessary language. Indeed, how his choice of language protected him: 'Immediately upon touchdown our concern is the integrity of the Lunar Module itself.'"

"There had been only one Columbus --there were ten astronauts at least who could do the job, and hundreds of men to back them up. He was the representative of a collective will." 38

When asked if he would keep a rock, Armstrong said, "That's not a prerogative we have available to us." Mailer: He could of course have said, 'We can't do it,' but in trouble he always talked computerese." 39

"It was as if the more natural forms of English had not been built for the computer: Latin maybe, but not simple Anglo-Saxon. That was too primitive a language -- only the general sense could be conveyed by the words: the precise intent was obliged to be defined by the tone of the voice. Computerese preferred to phase out such options. The message had to be locked into a form which could be transmitted by pulse or by lack of pulse, one binary digit at a time, one bit, one bug to be installed in each box. You could not break through computerese." 39

"Armstrong's near-to-facetious smile began to pique their respect..The writers were pushing Armstrong now." 41.

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Mailer refs (cont'd 2).

"Armstrong had now been maneuvered to the point where there was no alternative to offer but a credo, or claim that he was ~~spiritually~~ spiritually neuter. That would have violated too much in him. Yes, he blurted now, as if, damn them and damn their skills, they had wanted everything else of him this day, they had had everything else of him, including his full cooperation, now damn them good, they could have his philosophy too if they could comprehend it.

"I think we're going," he said, and paused, static burning in the ~~expanses~~ yaws of his pause, "I think we're going to the moon because it's in the nature of the human being to face challenges.' He looked a little defiant, as if probably they might not know, some critical number of them might never know what he was talking about, 'It's by the nature of his deep inner soul.' The last three words came out as if they had seared his throat by their exertion. How his privacy had been invaded this day. 'Yes,' he nodded, as if noting what he had to give up to writers, 'we're required to do these things just as ~~xx~~ salmon swim upstream.'" 41-42.

"NASA was vending space. Armstrong was working directly for his corporate mill. Despite the fact that this future audience of forty million would be listening and studying him, he spoke without long pauses, and seemed oddly enough to be at ease, a salesman with a clear modest mid soft sell. If Armstrong's most recognizable passion was to safeguard his privacy, a desire which approached the force of sanctuary to him, then there was nothing on television he would be likely to reveal or betray. 43-44.

"Their collaboration (Armstrong and Frank McGee) on the questions and responses had the familiar comfort of piety. Armstrong came near to chatting with him. It was implicit to Network Nugatory that a chatty tone went hand in hand with the pious. So the dullest but most functional, which is to say the most permeable side of Armstrong was naturally presented. He responded soberly, even chastely to questions about whether he had been elated when chosen -- 'I have to say that I was' -- but quickly added that there could have been many pitfalls during the waiting period (such as intervening flights which might not succeed) and so he had not indulged any large excitement at any particular period.

"He was determinedly modest, going clear out of his way, to specify that he was certain the Apollo 12 crew was as competent as his own to make this first trip to the moon, and went on once again to give credit for success to all the Americans who had been working to back them up. 'It's their success more than ours,' said Armstrong as if the trip had been completed already, or perhaps this was intended to be commercial to be employed after touchdown, or lunar ascent, or splashdown..." 44-45.

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Mailer refs. (cont'd 3)

"McGee, referring to a story in Life by Dora Jane Hamblin about Armstrong (4 July 69), spoke of a recurring dream the astronaut had had when a boy. In this dream, he was able to hover over the ground if he held his breath...It was a beautiful dream." 45