



God, the Moon and the Astronaut

Jacques Arnould, Dawn Cowlsey

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‘A cloth spread under an apple tree can catch only apples’, wrote Antoine de SaintExupéry in *Terre des hommes* (Land of Men), (English title: *Wind, Sand and Stars*), ‘and a cloth spread under stars can catch only stardust . . . What was most marvellous was that, there, standing on the planet’s rounded back, between this magnetic cloth and those stars, was a man’s consciousness in which that star-fall could be reflected as in a mirror.’ And a few pages further on he writes: ‘I was but a mere mortal lost between sand and stars, aware simply of the sweet pleasure of breathing.’

From the author of those lines to the writer of the first well known verses of the Bible: ‘In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth . . .’, stretch centuries of time and an intellectual and cultural abyss as well.

What could there be in common between the pilot of the first air route from Toulouse to Dakar and the direct descendants of Semitic nomads? Certainly not much, but for those star-pierced nights that deserts alone can offer for contemplation, combined with the tormenting question: what a thing is man, confronted by the cosmos, magnificent and terrible at the same time? This question has been haunting humanity from the beginning and gnaws at each of us: ‘Who am I? Where did I come from? Where does my destiny lie?’

To these questions, the desert dwellers, and the aviator lost like all their brothers in humanity, have given the same response. Certainly we are mortal beings, lost in the middle of the cosmos as in a desert, crushed by the weight of reality as by the immense celestial vault. And yet, we are unique, singular, irreplaceable; we are not less than the consciousness of the world, and, believers among them will say, we are even created in the image of God. Is that courage or lack of awareness, pretentiousness or faith?

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