

### Astronauts

Armored in oxygen,  
     faceless in visors –  
 mirrormasks reflecting  
     the general glare and  
 5 shadow of moonscape –  
     they walk in slowmotion  
 floating the lifeless  
     dust of Taurus  
 Littrow<sup>1</sup>. And Wow, they  
 10 exclaim; oh boy, this is it.

    They sing, exulting  
 (though trained to be wary  
     of “emotion and  
 15 philosophy”), breaking  
     the calcined<sup>2</sup> stillness  
 of once Absolute Otherwhere.

Risking edges, earthlings  
     to whom only  
 their machines are friendly  
 20 (and God’s radar-  
 watching eye?), they  
     labor at gathering  
 proof of hypothesis;  
     in snowshine of sunlight  
 25 dangerous as radium  
     probe detritus<sup>3</sup> for clues.

    What is it we wish them  
 to find for us, as  
     we watch them on our  
 30 screens? They loom there  
     heroic antiheroes,  
 smaller than myth and  
     poignantly human.  
 Why are we troubled?  
 35 What do we ask of these men?  
 What do we ask of ourselves?

Robert Hayden, *Collected Poems* (1985)

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<sup>1</sup> Taurus Littrow: name of a landing site on the moon

<sup>2</sup> calcined: heated to a point of oxidation

<sup>3</sup> detritus: fragments from disintegration