In Their Own Words

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EIGHT YEARS AFTER Ruth Nichols’s death, Anne Morrow Lindbergh (1906–2001) accompanied her husband to Cape Canaveral to observe the launch of the Apollo 8 circumlunar mission. This was not her first brush with either rocketry or space travel. Charles Lindbergh, learning of Robert H. Goddard’s experiments with liquid-fueled rockets, had met with the scientist in late 1929. Impressed by what he saw, Lindbergh arranged grants from the Carnegie Institution and the Daniel Guggenheim Fund for the Promotion of Aeronautics that allowed Goddard to take his research to Roswell, New Mexico. There he worked until the onset of World War II, developing his rockets and thinking of the possibilities of spaceflight. The Lindberghs visited him in New Mexico and, although Anne never witnessed a launch, she was aware of Goddard’s vision of future space travel and the lore and language of rocketry.

Where Nichols found only frustration in her vision of space travel, Anne found metaphor. She saw spaceflight as a means of gaining a still greater understanding of life on earth—all life, not just that of humans. She saw the space program of the 1960s as the next step in humanity’s moving into the cosmos, seeming to find in it many of the attributes that Nichols and the earlier women fliers found in aviation. While her writings on aviation often echo, at times even expand, those of the earlier fliers, her views on astronautics are less well-defined and she seems unaware of some crucial differences between aviation and astronautics. The differences are telling, as well as evocative, for they reflect her movement to a personalization of flight rather than a universalization.

Anne Morrow Lindbergh, even more than Ruth Nichols, was born to learning, wealth, and privilege. Her father, Dwight Morrow, a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Amherst College, was a senior partner with the J. P. Morgan banking firm, was United...
States Ambassador to Mexico from 1927 to 1929, and served in Congress as Senator for New Jersey. Her mother, Elizabeth Morrow, a Smith College alumna, had studied at the Sorbonne; she was actively involved with charitable and other causes, chaired the Smith Board of Trustees, and later served briefly as the institution’s acting president.

After graduating from Miss Chapin’s School in midtown Manhattan in 1924, Anne herself attended Smith, where she distinguished herself as a writer and won the college’s two most prestigious literary prizes.

She did not meet Charles Lindbergh until December 1927, when he was a guest of the Morrows at the American Embassy in Mexico. She had her first flight that same month, with Charles piloting a Ford Tri-Motor. The two found a mutual attraction; more formal courtship followed, and they announced their engagement in February 1929. They married in May 1929.

From 1929 until 1937 they made numerous flights together, all related to the development of American commercial aviation. Charles, like Pan American Airlines chairman Juan Trippe, recognized that “transoceanic routes constitute the last major problem in the development of the airlines of the world,” and his survey flights, sponsored by Pan American, “were for the purpose of studying the bases which might be used and the conditions which would be encountered along the various possible air routes between America and Europe.” Of particular concern were coastal areas near cities, with easy access to calm, deep harbors for the company’s luxurious flying boats.

Anne’s growing involvement with aviation was inevitable. Under Charles’s tutelage, she earned a glider pilot’s license in 1930 (the first American woman to receive such a license) and a private pilot’s license in 1931. As early as 1930 she was studying celestial navigation, tutored by Harold Gatty, who would navigate for Wiley Post during a record-setting round-the-world flight in 1931. In 1931 she began radio studies and in midyear received her license as a third-class radio operator. Charles had opened a membership at the Long Island Aviation Country Club among the notables listed by Ruth Nichols, and much of Anne’s early flying took place there.

In 1931 the couple embarked in a Lockheed Sirius floatplane on a three-month survey flight through Canada to the Soviet Union and Japan. A second, five-month flight in 1933 took them from the United States through Greenland to Europe and the Soviet Union, then on to Africa and across the South Atlantic to Brazil and back to home. The Sirius, built in 1929 to Charles Lindbergh’s specifications and the first of its kind, was a single-engined, low-winged monoplane powered by a 680 hp Wright Cyclone engine. Its wingspan (42 feet, 10 inches) was slightly less than that of Lindbergh’s Spirit of St. Louis, but, cruising at 185 mph, it was faster and capable of carrying a heavier load. Like the earlier Lockheed Vega, it had a molded wood fuselage and fixed landing gear (later replaced by floats). One innovation, suggested by Anne, was the addition of sliding, transparent canopies to cover the open cockpits.
These flights were the foundation for all but one of Anne’s writings on aviation. For her participation in the flights, she received the Hubbard Medal of the National Geographic Society, the tenth person and first woman to receive the award. In the accompanying commendation, the Society took note of how, with “hard, persistent work [she] mastered the intricate problems of aërial navigation and radio communication from airplanes,” and asserted that her work “encouraged millions of people to appreciate that air travel can be safe, comfortable, and enchanting.” She and Charles were to make only two other extended flights together, one in 1937 from England to India and another, at the behest of the American military, in 1938 to the Soviet Union. She allowed her flying license to expire in 1937 following the family’s move to England, “having decided to close that chapter in her life,” one of her biographers remarks, seemingly because she was “unable to reconcile the dual roles of author and aviator.” A move to France followed, and permanent expatriation seemed possible. With the onset of World War II, however, they returned permanently to the United States in 1939.

For all her determination to write, Anne published nothing until 1934, a realization that seemed to weigh heavily on her. In her diary, shortly before the circum-Atlantic
flight of 1933, she chided herself: “I haven’t stopped to breathe or think or live consciously or write in the last two months. And it wakes me to the fact that with all my talking I’ve never got a thing published, and I could do it—I could, but I haven’t got the guts. Oh, I want the recognition.” Yet, despite her self-reproach, she did not attempt to publish until an invitation from the National Geographic Society prompted her to write “Flying Around the North Atlantic” for the Society’s magazine. With the urging of British novelist Harold Nicholson and the publisher, Alfred Harcourt, she expanded the article into a book for the Harcourt Brace firm, and, with publication effectively assured, now had her incentive to write.

To have her first widely published work appear in *National Geographic* magazine was a happy circumstance, for it instantly put her name before a widespread and informed audience. Established in 1888, *National Geographic* magazine, the official publication of the National Geographic Society of the United States, had by 1934 won recognition as a reliable outlet for popularly written yet scientifically accurate accounts of worldwide exploration. While its focus necessarily was on terrestrial exploration, it had expanded the concept of exploration to include natural history, folkways, and manifestations of technology. Paramount among the latter was aviation. (Alexander Graham Bell, a founder and early president of the Society, had worked closely with Glenn Curtiss in early aircraft development.) From 1903 onward stories traced the development of “the geography of the air,” until the editor, speaking in 1936, proclaimed that “the *Geographic* has published more about aviation than any other magazine of general circulation.”

Anne’s essay was only the latest expression of aviation’s continuing presence in the magazine. The Hubbard Medal had already given her an authoritative cachet, and her article, published six months later and coupled with her association with Charles Lindbergh, confirmed her celebrity.

Charles Lindbergh’s presence in her experiences was apparent from the article’s start, for he introduced the essay with a two-page foreword sketching out the background of their flight and tying it firmly to the advancement of worldwide commercial aviation. He established his premise early on, noting that “the development of aircraft has now reached a point . . . which makes commercial transoceanic flying feasible.” At the same time, airlines necessarily recognized the shortcomings of their technology, which required “frequent bases and refueling facilities” along the routes; economic realities, moreover, dictated that “every additional mile which must be flown without refueling means that more fuel and less payload are carried.” For a transoceanic airline to be both practical and commercially viable, therefore, factors such as “climate, harbors, airport locations, [and] floating bases” had to be considered “in relation to practicability and economy of operation.” For all its exoticism and local color, the Lindberghs’ flight was driven by practical commercial concerns.
Those concerns play their part in the essay, but, for all its practical introduction by Charles and the mechanically chronological organization it follows, “Flying Around the North Atlantic” foreshadows the individualistic and emotional elements that would characterize Anne’s longer works to follow. It is a personalized account in which Anne’s voice regularly interrupts the flow of chronological narrative, injecting glimpses and insights that reflect the mind behind the report—a highly personal perspective, but one that enhances the work’s subtext of personal growth.

The idiosyncratic view is evident in the account of the flight’s takeoff from Bathurst, Gambia. Whereas the Lindberghs had found too much wind in Porto Praia in the Cape Verde Islands, here they encountered too little; without at least a measurable amount of wind to augment the heavily loaded airplane’s own generated speed, flight was impossible. After two failed efforts, they managed a takeoff, and Anne’s individual voice speaks out on its own: “Yes, we’re off—we’re rising. . . . We’re up above you—we were depending on you, just now, River, asking you for favors, for wind and light. But now we are free of you. . . . We can toss you aside—you, River—there below us, a few lights in the dark silent world that is ours—for we are above it.” Hers is the voice of more than a chronicler; it is the voice of a person who is engaged with her milieu.

While the flight itself furthered the development of commercial aviation, Anne’s essay reminded readers of the advances being made in aircraft technology and their potential effects upon mankind. Technology, in fact, rather than travel, opened the essay, as Anne devoted nine of the first eleven paragraphs to a careful description of her cockpit—the controls that enabled her to fly the craft if necessary, the engine monitoring and navigational instruments, the radio equipment, the necessary support equipment of maps and related materials, and the parachutes that doubled as cushions. All of these are a part of flight, and she establishes their importance before the aircraft even lifts off. Aviation requires the intermeshing of several forms of technology, and all are present in the cockpit.

Anne’s homage to technology continued as the flight leaves Bathurst. Her relief over the successful takeoff is matched by that of the anthropomorphized airplane. The aircraft had taken on its own identity when a Greenlander christened it Tingmissartoq (“one who flies like a big bird”), and now its personality blends with hers: “The engine smoothed out into a long sigh, like a person breathing easily, almost like someone singing, ecstatically. . . . The plane seemed exultant, then, even arrogant. We did it—we did it!” Here, for the first time in the essay, she presents the airplane as something more than an assemblage of parts. It is a willing participant in their flight and an entity capable of feeling emotion, even pride. The image is initially surprising, given the factual nature of the bulk of the essay, but is also revealing. The uniqueness of aircraft technology sets it apart as offering a new means for humanity to interact with nature, even
overcome it. Flight, as fliers before and after Anne have noted, gave its participants a feeling of exaltation, even transcendence. For the machine that makes all this possible to share in the experience is not at all surprising, and the aircraft’s arrogance at its triumph is its own expression of victory.

With the experience of her Geographic article behind her, Anne completed what was to become North to the Orient (1935), turning for her material to the earlier flight from the United States to Japan. She broke away from the strict, chronological format of the article and, using the device of a narrative frame, created a more nuanced story within a story. She set the opening and closing elements in the objective present, enclosing a longer narrative couched in the historical present. The device let her offer contemplative meditations in the present while relating a retrospective account of the flight, making the book that emerges an outwardly simple yet internally complex work.

The first words of the book set the stage, introducing both of the principal themes: “I have not written a technical account of a survey flight on the great circle route from New York to Tokyo. I do not know enough to write one.” She limits her narrative to the basic nature of the flight and her own initial ignorance of all that aviation technology might entail. She then goes on to expand the premises, reflecting that while the flight had its undeniably practical purposes, it also allowed her to ruminate on the confrontation of personality and technology. Thus, just as the technical side of the book becomes an account of “the collision of modern methods and old ones,” the personal side records the comparable collision of her “old” self and her new one. The result is a record of her self-discovery as well as the record of a flight.

Self-discovery begins with the past. As the flight sets out, she reflects upon the locales she and Charles have left, her family experiences, and the comfortable domestic rituals of the past: “I had great pleasures in straightening these confusions [activities of the past] in my mind, in clarifying the complexities of my childhood world.” In sorting and clarifying the “confusions” of the past, she turns from outward to inward, considering herself—a woman of a privileged and insulated milieu now absorbed in a new and radically different milieu—“as though I were looking back at my own life from some high point in the future.” This, of course, is exactly what she is doing as she proceeds with her story within a story, and she makes some telling discoveries.

Early on, Anne confesses that, as a woman in a man’s world, she feels somewhat of a misfit. On the occasions when she is allowed to “join the club” of technically competent men, she can respectfully acquit herself. Even so, her insecurity remains. She is the neophyte, painfully conscious of her inferior status. The press coverage of the trip’s beginning only strengthens her feelings. Prompted by a reporter’s question as to where the couple stowed their sandwiches, she muses: “I felt depressed, as I generally do when women reporters ask me conventionally feminine questions. . . . I feel slightly insulted. . . . Still, if I were asked about steely technicalities or broad abstractions, I
would not be able to answer, so perhaps I do not deserve anything better.” When the radio fails in the early hours of the flight, she is further humiliated; although she holds a radio operator’s license, she cannot recognize a fuse amongst the circuitry. After Charles shows her one, “I took out the fuses and sat subdued for the rest of the flight. Someone had once told me that I was incredibly stupid in mechanical things. Everyone would say it was because I was a woman. Perhaps it was.” She begins the journey put in her place by both social conventions and personal technological ineptness.

As the trip proceeds she finds that, in her husband’s mind at least, she is approaching (if not already having attained) parity. Even here, though, she feels a sense of theatricality, a sense that, somehow, things are not yet settled: “My husband never answered any questions about radio, even when he knew the answer far better than I did. He would just turn to me with the expression half proud and half anxious that a mother wears talking to her performing child, ‘Speak up now, Anne, say your piece for the gentlemen.’” But, if there is an element of condescension in Charles’s looking upon her as a performing prodigy, he also works to establish her as a full-fledged participant. Warned by a consultant that he would not take his wife over a particularly risky leg of the journey, Anne reports, Charles replies: “‘You must remember . . . that she is crew.’ And I felt even more flattered. (Have I then reached a stage where I am considered on equal footing with men?)”

The evolution has begun—externally in her public status as “crew,” internally with her speculation that she may be approaching a degree of gender equity. Her self-examination continues in the Soviet Union. There she encounters a governmentally proclaimed atmosphere of social progressivism and a professed equality unaffected by age or gender—“modern men, modern women, modern children.” Yet, for all the progress she has made in her own mind, she still finds herself a misfit: “I did not fit in there. Was I a modern woman? I flew a modern airplane and used a modern radio but not as a modern woman’s career, only as the wife of a modern man.” She imagines herself being questioned by some of the modern Soviets and believes she can explain herself only in terms of her marriage: “‘What do you do to justify your existence?’ ‘I don’t know.’ ‘Occupation?’ ‘Married.’”

The technical, “real-world” skills that she has mastered notwithstanding, she still thinks of herself conventionally as an adjunct to her husband and cannot yet see herself as a freestanding, self-defined individual.

The end of the process fittingly comes in the closing frame. There, safely back from the trip and flying with Charles to Washington, D.C., she reconciles her feelings and the world. “We were flying again, several years after our trip to the Orient,” she says. “It was for me simply flying, divorced from its usual accompanying responsibilities and associations. . . . Contented, I could look at that calm clear world below.” Though she has surrendered the flight controls to Charles, she is content in her place, more confident of her ability as a detached observer to look at the world and evaluate it in her own terms. She feels as if she has “a glass-bottomed bucket with which to look through
the ruffled surface of life far down to that still permanent world below.”

There is no distinction between her perspective and a man’s, no societally imposed roster of responsibilities and associations to color what she does or sees. Flight equips her, instead, with the detached, empirical vision of the pilot, whether male or female, and her individual experiences make it one that is peculiarly her own.

The second principal theme of North to the Orient, Anne’s discovery of, and response to, the emotional power of flight, also appears early on. Flight, she discovers, brings about a liberation of the personal vision, leading to perceptions that are new, even unique. In flight, she says, “there was no limit to what the eye could seize or what the mind hold—no limit, except that somewhat blurred but inescapable line of the horizon ahead.” From the air, old angles and old perspectives change. The horizon, so limiting to an earthbound observer, remains “inescapable” but becomes “blurred,” no longer the rigidly confining boundary of the distance. Anne’s fears that flight might desensitize the participant’s perceptions are unfounded. Instead, one sees from the air patterns, forms, and an otherwise imperceptible “outstretched beauty.”

The restrictions of time, space, and perspective that unconsciously limit an earthbound person’s grasp of reality are gone, swept away by the magical power of flight.

All of Anne’s themes converge in the final paragraphs of the book, as she reflects on where she has been, what she has done, and the part that flying has played in all her discoveries. “One could sit still and look at life from the air; that was it. And I was conscious again of the fundamental magic of flying, a miracle that has nothing to do with any of its practical purposes—purposes of speed, accessibility, and convenience—and will not change as they change.”

Aviation has practical applications with practical ends, as the trip demonstrates, but it possesses more profound qualities as well. The world is going to change: Anne’s experiences throughout the trip teach her that. The mechanisms of aviation are going to change as well. Aircraft will fly faster, grow larger, fly higher, and span greater distances. This ongoing change means that any given flight becomes a fixed moment in one’s experience that can never again be duplicated. Like Louise Thaden she presents flight as a special activity that, however dependent upon mechanisms, instills an ongoing sense of the miraculous. An unnatural undertaking it may be, as she says in her opening pages, but it has life-changing power. In opening horizons and changing perspectives it can make those individuals who participate in it more awakened, more enlightened, and more understanding of themselves and the world.

Reviews of the book were largely positive, echoing the earlier reception of her article. John Chamberlain, writing in the New York Times, confessed to “misgivings, having no preliminary guarantee that the author was a born writer in addition to being the daughter of one famous man and the wife of another.” He overcame his doubts, however, concluding that Anne was “a personality in her own right . . . [with] the seeing
eye and the memory that relates new things to the remembered old.” He saw the book as gaining impact by building upon “the omnipresent contrast between new and old,” becoming an account of one who “[lives] for [herself], not for any fictitious Public.”

C. G. Poore’s longer review in the New York Times Book Review picked up on several of the qualities Chamberlain identified, calling the book a work of “uncommon sensibility” that reveals its author’s determination to step away from “the tumult of the crowd.” Equally meditative was Clifton Fadiman’s review in the New Yorker. The book, he said, “pretends to no scientific value” but was instead “personal” and singularly “unbusiness-like, reflective, and appreciative of the trivia . . . that marked the journey.” His most telling judgment, however, came at the end of the review, as he asserted that “there is more of the fascination of flight in it than in most aviation stories I have run across.”

Anne’s awakening to flight’s uniqueness has come through.

The favorable reviews and substantial sales of North to the Orient encouraged Anne to begin a second book, one based on the 1933 circum-Atlantic flight. Her first book, as its title implied, was global in scope—global in a literal sense in that it involved a linking of East and West for commercial purposes, but global also in that it traced the flight from start to finish, recording objective events and personal insights along the way. The new book, Listen! The Wind (1938), was an equally personal narrative, but one more tightly focused than the first book. The reasons for the circum-Atlantic flight were no less commercial than those of the flight to Asia, but she now wrote only of a ten-day segment of the endeavor and the importance of a single episode within the flight.

Like North to the Orient, Listen! The Wind utilized a frame structure—but one notably different from that of the earlier book. This frame is a double one. It begins with a foreword written by Charles tying the flight to the development of commercial aviation and transoceanic flights and ends with an appendix, also by Charles, detailing the mechanical elements of the journey. The book, he writes in his foreword, is “a true and accurate account of various incidents which occurred in flying from Africa to South America.” The flight, he continues, was “to study the air-routes between America and Europe. . . . The countries had already been crossed and the continents connected. It remained only for the oceans to be spanned. Their great over-water distances constituted the last major barrier to the commerce of the air.” Commercial aviation is an engine of progress, and that progress must not be obstructed.

At the same time, he is concerned with the future of flight in general, injecting an element of nostalgia and seeming to recognize the inevitable changes that accompany progress. Their flight was made in a single-engined, open-cockpit float plane, incorporating the latest aeronautical developments of the time. By 1938, however, the craft is obsolescent if not obsolete. Thus, the book becomes “about a period in aviation which is now gone, but which was probably more interesting than any the future will bring.” It was a time that offered the flier an unprecedented intimacy with the forces
of nature and the world at large, but one that was fading quickly: “As times [sic] passes, the perfection of machinery tends to insulate man from contact with the elements in which he lives.” The flier of the future, insulated by the technology about him or her, “will be aloof from both the problems and the beauty of the earth’s surface. . . . Wind and heat and moonlight take-offs will be of no concern to the transatlantic passenger. His only contact with these elements will lie in accounts such as this book contains.”

Commercial aviation will supply ease of travel, but at the cost of insight and understanding. Charles’s appendix continues the aeronautical elements, giving a detailed technical description of the airplane—and the stoical observation that the craft “now hangs in the Hall of Ocean Life at the American Museum of Natural History.” An era that represented the high point of American aviation and an airplane that was once the leading edge of technology have reached their limits, their relics consigned to museums.

Charles Lindbergh talks of the historic sweep and applications of aviation; Anne Lindbergh takes a more abstract approach. The second frame opens and closes the book with the wind: a tail wind at the outset, a general, unexceptional wind at the end. Each plays its part. The tail wind speeds *Tingmissartoq* on its way, boosting its speed as it overcomes distances. The more general wind is moderate, steady, and exactly what a flier desires—but now is of no consequence, for the Lindberghs have successfully crossed the Atlantic and landed at their base in Natal. They have reached a desired conclusion, as the narrator of the book has herself arrived at a similar, personal conclusion. Thus, the opening frame links the book to the external forces of technology and commerce; the inner one evokes the abstract, indifferent forces of the natural world.

Within the double frame Anne opens a dialogue with herself, considering the place and defining the roles of commerce, technology, and humanity within the larger context of the flight. More than one airline was eyeing transatlantic service, and Pan American Airlines’ competition with these companies underlies the text. France’s flagship airline, Aéropostale, had established a route along the western coasts of Europe and Africa in 1929, extending from France through Spain and Morocco until reaching Dakar. There passengers boarded a steamer for the trip to South America, then resumed the aerial portion of their trip on Aéropostale routes along the eastern coast of South America. The company’s finances were precarious, and in 1933 it declared bankruptcy and became part of the newly formed Air France. It left a string of derelict bases throughout Europe and Africa, and their presence, like Anne’s references to Deutsche Luft Hansa’s twelve-engined DO-X flying boat, was a reminder of the commercial forces driving the Lindberghs’ flight. When Pan American began transatlantic service in 1934, its superior aircraft and more rigorously operated bases made it “France’s most dangerous rival.” That competition and Aéropostale’s failure are important elements in Anne’s narrative.
A second part of Anne’s dialogue is her ongoing reflection on the individual’s relationship with external reality. In *North to the Orient* she was concerned with personal evolution. In *Listen! The Wind* she takes up the greater matter of the individual person in an empirical world. What part, she asks, do the forces of nature play, and what part the forces of society and commerce? Where, within this confluence of forces, does the power of technology come into play, and what is its influence? And how is an individual to deal with the consequences of these matters, as he or she sets out to become an integrated part of the larger world and society? Her questioning makes the book even less a travel narrative than *North to the Orient* and far more an introspective meditation on experience and life.10

The first of the overarching themes that Anne introduces is mankind’s desire to subordinate the world to technology and commerce. She and Charles embraced a technologically sophisticated modern world, making their way aboard one of the latest creations of aeronautical technology. Their technology has triumphed in the past, and they see no reason for it not to continue to triumph. This is the perspective that opens the book, as Anne reflects on the flight at hand: “With the great strides of the summer’s flight behind us, and the wide limitless sky ahead, there was no end to our powers.” Her confidence leads her to a hubristic moment of omniscience as they view the harbor at Porto Praia: “Like gods still we were, looking down from our great height at the . . . minute ripples glistening far below, the toy boats bobbing in the water. . . . Leaving our Olympian heights we began to circle down, the engine breathing more easily in a glide.”11

Equally reassuring is their expectation that, at the Aéropostale base at Porto Praia, they will find all of the sustaining attributes of a modern, technological world: “How comforting to see the broad roof and great open door of a modern hangar, the concrete pier with a big derrick at its edge, the . . . two tall radio towers. Here was the world of Aviation. Here was efficiency; here was comfort.” Their first impressions on land seem to confirm their assumptions. Walking toward the Aéropostale hangar, she muses: “On first sight the building had the familiar air of any big hangar at home. The same crisscrossing of steel rafters above our heads; the same ribbed look of the long walls . . . all symbols to me of the competence and facilities of a modern aviation base.”12 Within minutes of this inference, however, they learn otherwise.

The French airline has abandoned the station, leaving behind only deteriorating facilities and a skeleton crew to tend them. Neither spare parts nor repair facilities are available, and the base cannot provide even simple supplies to pull the airplane from the water. In addition, they learn, the massive DO-X had been stalled in Porto Praia for a month, grounded because “something was not quite right.”13 The DO-X, operated by Deutsche Luft Hansa, had embarked on a circum-Atlantic flight in 1930. Plagued
by mechanical and other problems, it did not return to its home base until 1932. The entire operation was bleak testimony to the failings of both commerce and technology.

Those failings lead Anne to consider the impotence of technology in the face of nature. In Porto Praia the wind is too strong and the sea too rough to permit them to take off, and they willy-nilly must wait. As they prepare for their departure they are, Anne writes, “all ready. Everything ready, everything under control of man—except the wind.” The wind is so steady and so powerful that being stranded like the DO-X becomes a reality: “Listening to that wind roaring above us distantly, I had a sudden feeling of panic. . . . We here, on this island, were caught in an eddy, a backwater, out of the stream,” where imprisoned fragments “never made any progress, never won their way out again to the whirling current.”

Anne’s sense of their relationship to nature has advanced since her remarks on Porto Praia in “Flying Around the North Atlantic.”

The perspective changes yet again when they at last reach Bathurst, for there they face the opposite problem; there is too little wind. Bathurst, a prosperous British community, initially offers all that Porto Praia lacked: “Life was going on here; it meant something. Time counted; we were in the stream again.” Yet ironically, for all the comforts of commerce and technology, Bathurst cannot supply the help of nature. Several failed takeoff attempts follow, each accompanied by a progressive stripping of the aircraft—clothing, tools, supplies, even unneeded parts are discarded—but to no avail. Then, at last, the wind briefly becomes strong enough to help the takeoff (a dubious local official describes it as “almost a dead calm”) and the Lindberghs make their try. In language and imagery echoing the same episode in “Flying Around the North Atlantic,” Anne paints the takeoff as a struggle between nature and technology. When technology at last triumphs, she is ecstatic: “The plane seems exultant now, even arrogant. We did it, we did it. . . . ! We were dependent on you just now, River, prisoners fawning on your for favors. . . . But now, we are free. We are up; we are off. We can toss you aside.” Technology has triumphed and the progress of commerce can resume, but she now sees that triumph in a new and more informed light.

Anne’s newly sensitized understanding opens the way for the second central theme of her work, the individual’s relationship to reality. In her newly awakened state, she comes to understand that, rather than a single external reality, there exists instead a multiplicity of realities, each with its own demands and requirements. Within this surfeit of worlds, the unaware individual runs the risk of isolation or estrangement. This is a theme that concerns her throughout the work, reflected in her later comment in her journals that total freedom is in great part a myth. Life becomes a circumstance in which “we usually only exchange one set of restrictions for another. The second set, however, is self-chosen.” In her case, she continues, she “exchanged the insulation of. . . a cloistered life of books for the insulation of fame,” as set apart from the world as she had ever been.
Listen! The Wind offers a succession of similar discoveries. The first is the realization that, as a flier and technologically competent person, she is set apart from the world of conventional social formulas. Soon after they arrive in Porto Praia, the Portuguese governor invites them to a meal. “We were,” she thinks to herself, “going to the Governor’s for lunch. (The cool verandas, the brocade sofas, the women in summer dresses and lipstick.) How far removed I was from that world—I, in my dusty trousers climbing up this hill.” That removal, moreover, is a telling one: “Even if I changed my trousers for a cotton dress . . . , outwardly conforming to the code of civilization, could I ever really get back to that world?” This reflection, in turn, leads her to grasp a larger point: “I felt we were separated from the Governor’s house in Praia by a great gulf which could not be bridged . . . , of our own choosing.” For all their fame and fortune, the Lindberghs are not a part of the governor’s social existence; their deliberately self-selected world sets them apart.

The individual faced with this isolation has little recourse but to turn inward: “Sometimes while I waited, I had tried to live more intensely in the little things imprisoned with me.” Finding little comfort in this response, she arrives at another: “Waiting could only be linked to life by accepting it, by seeing value in it for itself.” Like a farmer waiting for a crop or a pregnant woman awaiting a birth, the individual must depend “on things outside himself; but still, having faith in those things, in the slow but inevitable process before him.” From that faith comes an altered vision, disclosing that “in this apparent vacuum something was growing; that . . . everything was converging into the pattern of our lives.” A multiplicity of worlds moving at a multiplicity of speeds forces the individual at last to rely on faith in one’s self and one’s abilities—an amorphous and intangible conclusion at best.

The recognition and appreciation of self and ability leads to Anne’s synthesis of all that has gone before. One must take comfort in the mastering of one’s own role and activities. When those activities build bridges to the other worlds of reality, the outcome is happy. She hints at this synthesis in 1936, as the book was in progress. Writing to her sister, Constance, she says that she has come to see that the outcomes available to a woman working in a male-dominated, predominantly technological world, are real, but different from those available to men. The woman who works in this realm “has got to be content with a different kind of result—not a tangible one, not one you can weigh. But perhaps one that is bigger, broader, more general, more intangible—but nevertheless a whole.”

This conclusion anticipates those of Listen! The Wind. Gaining understanding, she tells her sister, requires each person to develop “something wheel-like, with the essence of you at the center.” At the heart of this wheel-like, outreaching construction “there must be a concentrated core, a hub at the center that is specialized, in order to hold all those diverse spokes together. And each person must find her own specialized core.
But she must never fool herself into thinking that the core is the whole. It is just there so that the wheel can go round—to keep the whole going.” She thus combines the personal and the global, calling for each person to connect with the outer worlds in ways dependent upon his or her unique capabilities.

Anne’s fullest statement of this synthesis emerges near the end of *Listen! The Wind*. As she prepares for the projected sixteen-hour flight across the Atlantic, she settles snugly into the rear cockpit of *Tingmissartoq*, surrounded by the radio and navigational equipment that she has mastered. This is *her* place, an “all-important world” that gives “a sense of security, no matter how precarious it may actually be—even hurtling blindly through the air.” There follows an inventory of the cockpit equipment similar to the one that opens “Flying Around the North Atlantic,” but now she invests the equipment with a special meaning that the earlier work lacks, gaining security and confidence from its familiarity and her mastery of its function.

The cockpit is her “little room,” and she writes of its equipment with new insight. The cockpit seat, for example, becomes “the center of my world.” That world, the cockpit, is one in which things are known intimately by touch as well as by sight: “Everything was within arm’s reach. . . . Everything obeyed my hand.” She is in command of her world, and paramount among the equipment is the radio transmitting key that connects the flight with the other worlds: “It fitted lightly between my fingers, as comfortable, as familiar, as a pencil; obedient as any tool, and, as a tool, giving one a sense of pleasure to use it, play with it, master it.” She has become the “concentrated core” that she described to her sister. The spokes that radiate outward are her radio calls, and she, as woman and as master, works to keep the entire flight going. The recognition gives her a comfortable feeling of competence as she accepts her role: “My work had begun. . . . How nice to be in your own little room, to pull your belongings around you, to draw in like a snail in his shell, to work!”

She thinks of herself as a fully formed individual, secure in a world of her own making, ready to confront and deal with the other worlds of life.

The critical reception of *Listen! The Wind* was as positive as that of *North to the Orient*. An early review in the *New York Times* called it “a nearly perfect little book,” while a fuller review three days later called it “sensitively and nobly written” and “attuned also to the very ripple of time across the surface of the passing moment.” Clifton Fadiman, again writing in the *New Yorker*, quipped about writing versus literature but went on to praise the book for combining “the miracle of flying” with flight’s “emotional quality, what it does to a person.” The critics’ approval was a fitting conclusion to the three works growing out of the survey flights and confirmed Anne Lindbergh as a writer deeply concerned with individuality and life.

Eleven years after the last of the survey flights and six years after the publication of *Listen! The Wind*, Anne turned to fiction to continue her exploration of emotional
and personal evolution. In 1937 the Lindberghs had flown to India in a light plane, a single-engined Miles Mohawk. En route they became lost for a time in heavy clouds over the Alps and a crash was a real possibility. She recalled the episode six years later, using her powerful emotions, now recollected in tranquility from records in her diary, to create an account of one woman’s road to self-knowledge. The Steep Ascent (1944), she says in a brief preface, contains “everything that those ten years [of flying] taught me.” These lessons, combined with the consciousness of World War II swirling about her, lead her to conclude that “the world of flying provides in a most compact and tangible . . . form that exceptional circumstance which permits one to realize the intersection line of two planes of existence.” For her, the intersecting planes allow her to tell “the story of a woman’s life and ordeal—any woman and any ordeal.” Where once she was concerned solely with individual growth and evolution, she now moves on to speak of and for all women.

The novel’s protagonist, Eve Alcott, five months pregnant with her second child, sets out in a light plane piloted by her husband, world-renowned British racing pilot Gerald Alcott, on a trip to Egypt. As they approach the Alps, they fly into an unexpected zone of clouds and become lost. They have two choices: continue onward through the clouds, hoping at last to fly out of them before exhausting their fuel, or descend through them in search of clear air below the cloud deck—both dangerous choices. Eve’s fears, already substantial, grow when Gerald strays off course while tracing a valley pass through the mountains. Although she can accept fear in the abstract, her thoughts increasingly focus upon her own life and that of her unborn child. When Gerald elects to risk penetrating the clouds, Eve confronts her fears. The aircraft descends, Gerald inches his way to a safe bottom to the cloud layer, and they make their way through the mountains to land safely in Italy. The epiphany of rebirth that Eve feels upon their safe arrival speaks eloquently of the essence of life and how such a passage to understanding becomes universal.

Three complementary elements shape The Steep Ascent, each giving depth and resonance to the others. The first is the time’s (and Eve’s) sense of “the place” of women. As she prepares to say goodnight to Peter, their five-year-old, Eve recalls the caretaker of their rented cottage showing her and Gerald the bedroom the child was to use. It was “hardly a room, a tiny raftered hall of their old English farmhouse,” but he pointedly speaks of it as “His Master’s dressing room.” To her, the American, the intent is clear. In wry retrospection she recalls that he was overtly “breaking her in . . . to what an Englishman’s wife should know.” In a dozen words Anne lays the foundation for Eve’s development throughout the story. Although he never overtly expresses any such feeling of masculine dominance over Eve, Gerald, a Britisher, is steeped in the culture, and the reader’s awareness of that culture and its conventions prepares the way for the tensions developing later in the story.
Other tensions develop from Eve’s pregnancy. She is beset with advice and attitudes that relegate her to a preconceived role, consigned to a conventional and diminished condition by a Mother’s Aid manual. Why, she asks herself, is she going on the flight to Egypt, when a “normal” woman would stay at home: “Avoid all stress and strain,” said the Mother’s Aid book and ‘The pregnant woman should not travel.’ Yet she is, she concludes, making the trip “for herself, . . . because of something very strong in herself. A feeling for life, she guessed it was.” Though she cannot yet articulate it, she senses the beginning of her evolution. The conventional view of pregnancy sets “the woman” apart, creating an “other being” that somehow is a lesser entity: “The pregnant woman.” Dreadful phrase. She had always hated it. How it cheapened life, and she hated anything that cheapened life. It left out the child. She is harboring a new life, and the awareness heightens her sense of worth and self-knowledge. She can disregard the cheapening that society puts upon her and accept her place as a part of an onward-moving, exalting process. Her pregnancy, therefore, gives her the first impetus toward her imminent self-discovery.

The course of that self-discovery, the second principal element of the book, comes to the fore once the Alcotts’ flight is underway. Just as physical flight creates new perspectives on the ground beneath, Anne suggests, when the human spirit is removed from earth by flight, it gains a new perspective on itself. For Eve, that perspective is a greater understanding of the preciousness of existence. Initially considering herself a creature of the earth who “loved this earth and earth things,” Eve first tastes fear as she reflects on “the fear of losing earth that made you love it so much.” The fear grows as the flight becomes more hazardous. As they pick their way among alpine peaks, Eve recalls that their lives are dependent upon the machine in which they are sitting. They are precariously “balanced on a needle’s point, balanced on the blast of an engine, on the flutter of a wing,” yet the realization gives her a greater sense of reality; “the nearness to death made life more alive, and beauty more beautiful.” She has taken the first step in her progression.

Eve’s consciousness of their danger strips away her illusions and advances her progress. “All the mists of fear, dreams, and self-deception,” Anne writes, “had been burnt clean by the blinding flash of realization of what faced them.” In this newly sensitized state, Eve comes to see that life and death are an organic whole. They are complementary elements of a new existence. For her, “there was no space, no room in her heart for anything but this new and overpowering sensation which filled her to the brim. What was it? Not resignation. . . . No, it was a kind of positive acceptance and she reposed on it in complete peace and calm, like the maple seed on the shaft of air.” With this greater understanding comes “a sudden sense of luxury. All those petty details of life were attended to. Now, at last, [she] can turn to the big thing before [her].” She is, at last, equipped to view and examine her life with tranquility.
The final element of *The Steep Ascent* is flight itself. However deeply she may be concerned with societal views of women and the inner growth of self-knowledge, Anne never lets the reader forget that all of these deliberations are tied to the larger milieu in which Eve exists—that is, that of an airplane, in flight, with all of the exaltation and all of the fear that such an experience carries. In the airplane Eve enters another world, one as distinct as any of those Anne invokes in *Listen! The Wind*. Here she perceives, examines, and at last understands the diverse feelings that dominate her thoughts and self-reflection. These are matters that have not concerned her during her mundane, earthly days; only after she enters the airplane and ascends into the sky do they emerge to energize her own meditations and conclusions.

As Eve and Gerald prepare to take off for their flight across the Channel and through the skies of France and Switzerland, she takes comfort from the power—literal and spiritual—of the aircraft engine. “The roar of the motor blocked off the outside world. Vibrations surged through the plane in a gigantic current of power. It shook confidence into Eve and she felt like bowing before it as to some mighty pagan god. How could anything go wrong with such a power on their side?” Technology creates an apotheosis: sound and vibration, in one sense simply physical consequences of internal combustion, here become spiritual entities so compelling that Eve is tempted to bow before them. Her human existence is, for the moment, subordinate to the power of the airplane.53

Anne broadens her metaphor by next linking the airplane to the act of birth, explicitly tying it and its flight to Eve’s pregnancy and the coming child. An airplane’s takeoff, she writes, is a process whereby the airplane reaches “some indefinable point [at which it] shifts its allegiance from earth to sky.” When it reaches that point, the machine itself is reborn, becoming an entity of the air rather than one of the ground: “It may still be traveling along the earth’s surface, apparently tied to it, but in reality it has severed its cord; it has acknowledged, secretly somewhere, that its element is air.”54 The severing of a baby’s umbilical cord marks the child’s transition from life *in utero* to life in the external world. The takeoff process, like that of birth, is a mechanical one, but, when the transition at last occurs, the airplane is reborn. The mechanical becomes the transcendent.

Once in the air, in its proper element, the airplane has new power. As their flight proceeds across the Channel, towns, ships, even people become toylike in her vision, and Eve feels herself freed from the demands of the mundane world: “This was the joy of flying. . . . There was a freedom about it, a limitless feeling of space and time. The day and the world stretched before them, endless . . .”55 An epiphany of flight occurs near the book’s end, paving the way for the new sense of self that she has achieved. She and Gerald, in their airplane, a “flimsy bit of plywood and steel,” confront the Alps, majestic, natural giants that stand between them and their goal of Italy. Physically flimsy though it may be, however, the airplane has a transcending power: “They were equal to the giants, then,” Eve thinks. Then, returning to the metaphor of thread/cord/
In Their Own Words

umbilical, she makes an explicit statement of flight-born ecstaticy: “Eve tingled with excitement. Ah, this, this was flying—to leave the clouds below; to let go of earth, to touch it no longer, not even with your fingertips; no Ariadne thread to guide you, no silken skein to join you to earth. To abandon earth utterly and climb into the upper reaches of sky; to meet the mountains eye to eye.” She is no longer a thing of earth. Like Judy Anderson in “Sky Girl,” she believes she has broken the thread of conventional existence as surely as the airplane severed its umbilical to the earth, and now can leave the mundane and ascend to the heights of pure existence. She has, as much as any of the pilots and persons of whom Joseph Corn writes, wholly embraced the winged gospel. She now more fully knows herself and her relationships to time and the world, and that knowledge has come through the exercise of aviation.

Reviewers acknowledged that the novel was an advance beyond North to the Orient and Listen! The Wind, just as the earlier books had advanced beyond conventional flying narratives. Some responded to its language, calling it “excellent imagist poetry, a sensitive evocation of certain feminine reactions to an adventurous flight.” Others saw past the language to the content. Beatrice Sherman, writing in the New York Times Book Review, stated that “its charm and grace are rooted in the fabric of the author’s mind and in the fruit of her philosophy,” while Edmund Wilson in the New Yorker called it “a series of pensees [sic] on such varied subjects as England, France, life, death, and fear, . . . [and] one of the most arresting short novels of recent years.” More intensely personal than the two flying books preceding it, the novel was a farewell to Anne’s writings on conventional aviation.

Anne wrote nothing further of flight and flying for a quarter of a century. Then, when she and Charles were invited to the Apollo 8 launch in 1968, Life Magazine commissioned her to report on the event. The resulting essay, “The Heron and the Astronaut,” appeared in the 28 February 1969 issue of Life. She subsequently paired the work with an essay of four years earlier, “Immersion in Life,” and published the two together as Earth Shine later in 1969. The essays, she said in her preface to the compilation, were unified by their focus on global interrelatedness. When one viewed Earth from a spacecraft, she wrote, “it is the earth which is the miracle.” Thirty years earlier she had viewed technology as a miracle; now her sense of the miraculous has moved to viewing the planet terrestrially rather than “hemispherically.” She makes a leap from the personal to the global without further thoughts of the intermediate society that might come about.

The Lindberghs’ evolving environmental consciousness lies behind Earth Shine, giving a context for Anne’s reactions to the space program and the Apollo mission. The airplane, she says, allowed early fliers to “discern more clearly the bones of earth and [become] aware, as Saint-Exupéry was, of how ephemeral is the flesh that clothes it.” When the planet is viewed from space, however, “the sense of the earth as a whole, as a
planet, is with us inescapably.” Thus, the view from space creates for her a new vision of the planet as a unified ecosystem; she never uses the phrase “Spaceship Earth,” but she understands its implications. The worldwide unity revealed by the vision of the planet’s atmosphere and oceans transcends the puny geopolitical matters that obsess countries and peoples.

She acknowledges that this new vision is possible only through the workings of an enormous, complex enterprise. As she and Charles tour the NASA facilities at Cape Canaveral, she begins “to be overwhelmed and rather oppressed by the complexity, weight, and detail of what the astronauts lightly call the ‘hardware’ of rocketry.” And yet, despite the “sheer weight and cold intricacy of this computerized, electronic, machine-oriented world” so unintelligible to the layman, its goal is “the advancement of knowledge for all mankind.” The discoveries of the space program will benefit not the individual, not the community, but “all mankind.” She cannot say what those benefits may be; she only knows that they will advance the human race.

While three men made the flight to the Moon in 1968, behind the flight was a vast, largely unseen pyramid of technology and effort, with the astronauts at the apex. Anne acknowledges the existence of the pyramid, saying that “it is the men above all that matter, the individuals who man the machine, give it heart, sight, speech, intelligence, and direction; and the men on earth who are backing them up, monitoring their every move, even to their heartbeats.” She does not consider, however, that the pyramid creating them also isolates the astronauts from those helping them and those watching them. Recognition of the Apollo pyramid, in the simplest sense, came from an awareness of the 400,000 persons and 20,000 civilian corporations constituting the material side of the project. In another sense, however, it was a manufactured construct described by two marketing scholars as “the largest, and we believe the most important, marketing and public relations case story in history.” To support that case story, NASA created a public affairs office that, by the late 1960s, comprised “a team of some sixty people, including thirty-five regular Public Affairs staffers and thirty-five ‘special assignment’ contract employees.” These were the persons charged with the task of interpreting the Apollo program for the American public, and the image they created easily overshadowed the reality.

The magnitude of the publicity challenge was mirrored in the magnitude of the machines involved. As Scott and Jurek note, “the Saturn V alone consisted of more than 3,000,000 parts, ranging from nuts and bolts to circuit boards, washers, and transistors. The command and service module had nearly 2,000,000 parts; the lunar module, 1,000,000.” This machine was a construct far beyond the means and abilities of a single person. It of necessity had to be the product of a collaborative effort and it, rather than the thousands of individuals involved, was the focal point of the process. Charles Lindbergh only confirmed this reality when he cabled his congratulations to
the Apollo 8 astronauts: “THE GREATEST FEAT OF TEAMWORK IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD.”

The astronauts may indeed have experienced the ecstasies of space flight, but for the rest of the world those ecstasies are only vicarious. Whereas Ruth Nichols sought to open the astronaut corps to women, making it at least somewhat more inclusive, Anne accepts (perhaps does not understand) the program’s elitism and, unavoidably, its covert sexism. She admires the astronauts’ intelligence, skill, and courage but says nothing of their limited number or gender exclusivity. In reality, only they, a tiny, aristocratic society among the technological elect, will experience space. Everyone else will be only an observer.

At the start of the U.S. space program, the nation’s attention was focused on the Mercury 7—the seven male astronauts who were to fly in the Mercury capsule and, in time, achieve Earth orbit. Six of them flew, with John Glenn, the third to be launched, becoming the first American to orbit the Earth. By the time of the Apollo 11 launch, the astronaut corps had been expanded to five groups totaling fifty-five men. From these groups, thirty-two astronauts (including the three killed in the fire aboard Apollo 1) participated in active training for Moon launches. Of the thirty-two, only twelve walked on the Moon. These twelve became a special aristocracy within a culture of elites.

Here is where Anne Morrow Lindbergh reveals a blind spot. She sees ecstatic, uplifting results from the space program, but she fails to see that those results will—and can—be directly experienced only by an elite few. Becoming an astronaut involves a grueling, exhaustive selection process, one that eliminates many more than it passes. Arbitrarily excluding women along the way, the process restricts spaceflight to only the elect few who can pass its arbitrary hurdles. That she does not see this reflects her times as much as her origins; she is indeed thinking globally, even aristocratically, and she bypasses the part played by the mundane individual in the process.

Conventional aviation, like spaceflight, rested on a similar (albeit smaller) pyramid of development and effort, but gaining its apex was far more attainable. Even if airplane ownership became beyond the means of much of the populace, the dream of flight, with all its benefits, was accessible to all. Individuals could reasonably aspire to becoming a pilot and owning an airplane. To build an airplane in one’s garage seemed at least possible; to build a spaceship in one’s garage was ludicrous. The democratic optimism of flight, as utopian in its nature as the ecstasy of space, reached farther and deeper than the vicarious attractions of space. That Anne overlooks the distinction reflects the vanishing of the dreams of the Golden Age of Aviation.

When Anne Morrow Lindbergh took up flying, it was still a fascinating novelty—a time, she noted in her diary in 1932, when “flying was an art.” It had substantially advanced by the time she wrote of the flights described in North to the Orient and
Listen! The Wind. Airplanes were larger; engines were more reliable; speeds and ranges were greater. She was also present at the creation of American commercial flight, accompanying Charles when he piloted the inaugural eastbound flight of Transcontinental Air Transport in 1929. In those years she absorbed the excitement of flight that foreshadowed exciting developments for the individual and the society alike. Aviation, however, was not standing still. By 1943, when she published The Steep Ascent, commercial flight had entered the stratosphere with the 1938 introduction of the four-engined, pressurized Boeing Model 307 Stratoliner, transcontinental and transoceanic travel was commonplace, and the airplane itself had new prominence as a weapon. Long-range, four-engined bombers such as the Boeing B-17 and the Consolidated B-24 were flying in all theaters of World War II. The Boeing B-29, the first fully pressurized, high-altitude bomber, was beginning to enter service, and the light plane of the book seems oddly quaint.

Her view of the world was altered by other events as well. After Anne surrendered her pilot’s license in 1937, the Lindberghs’ lives took on a new and public coloration. Charles, having favorably evaluated German aeronautical development for the U.S. military in 1936 and 1937, became increasingly pro-German in his views and, in 1938, received a medal from the Third Reich, the “Service Cross of the German Eagle, with Star.” He seemed to find in much of Hitler-era Germany “the embodiment of his values: science and technology harnessed for the preservation of a superior race.” As the likelihood of a European war grew, he vocally opposed United States involvement; he spoke widely for the right-wing America First movement and was staunchly pro-German and anti-Semitic in his pronouncements. Whatever her innermost views may have been, Anne went along, in 1940 publishing a brief book, The Wave of the Future, that, as she wrote to her mother, attempted “to give a moral argument for Isolationism.” Readers saw the work as “a recapitulation” of Charles’s more extreme views and it became “one of the most despised books of its day.” When Charles then gave an unequivocally anti-Semitic speech in Des Moines, Iowa, in September 1941, the two found themselves reviled by the media and politically (and, occasionally, socially) shunned. Their change in national status was a blow to one so self-engrossed as Anne and so once-adulated as Charles, and it did not fade until long after the end of World War II. The world Anne had experienced by 1943 was far removed from that she and Charles had experienced in the 1930s.

Faced with dramatic changes in life and in the realm of aviation, she looked backward in The Steep Ascent, drawing upon her experiences of flight to shape one last story about a woman and an airplane. In it she metaphorically made herself a spokesperson for all women, using the airplane as the vehicle that helped her on her way to new insights and Understandings. Anne wrote of a time that in 1944 no longer existed but revived the exalting elements of flight as she had earlier perceived them. There is no
evidence that she read, or was even aware of, any of her predecessors in women’s flight (excepting only Amelia Earhart, whom she considered a friend). Indeed, as a biographer observes, Anne “never earned a reputation as a true flyer” among the “small coterie” of notable women fliers, and was seen by many of them “as an appendage to Charles.” Yet, like them, despite living in a world far removed from the one that most of them enjoyed, she believed in flight’s ability to further self-discovery.

The popular historian David McCullough, writing forty years after *The Steep Ascent*, observed: “The airplane offered a spiritual pilgrimage in ways other machines had not before. . . . Aviators wrote of being lifted out of themselves by the very act of flight, of becoming part of something infinitely larger than themselves.”71 Anne expressed this sense to a degree but could not move beyond her own “spiritual pilgrimage.” That pilgrimage was a profound one, enhanced by what one reviewer called her “clear individuality and unusual gifts.” It empowered her to step out of a world of aloof aesthetic contemplation and into that of technology and commerce. It was a revelatory undertaking that made possible a perception of life and self that without aviation she likely would not have attained, and it led her, in 1943, to state that, in flight, “this is my country, my life, my vision. I am at home again in the air.”72 It removed her from the mundane and the muffling, sensitizing her to the larger intersections of human existence—those of male and female, personal and social, birth and death. Her life was hers to live, still detached, still privileged, and still wholly human, but with a fuller understanding of the spiritual and social forces working outside her realm.

For those who could experience them, flight’s qualities encouraged the development of a vision enabling one to confront life with new clarity and new determination; in 1939, after effectively having given up flying, Anne observed in her diary: “It is strange that aviation, the newest and most modern of activities, should bring one back into close contact with the elements again.”73 In that elemental contact was one of the reformative powers of flight. For herself, she understood the extent (and limits) of her growth as a person of the Golden Age of Aviation. Thanks to flight, she was at last equipped to confront the harsh realities and transcendent joys of a broader existence. Those joys, however, she kept for herself. When she returned one last time to describe the experience of flight, she dealt with spaceflight, not aviation. She struggled to extend the joys of aviation to spaceflight but ignored the crucial, limiting differences between the two undertakings. Aviation, at least in the popular belief, could raise the individual to new levels and new achievements. Spaceflight, if viewed dispassionately, could not, and in embracing it Anne Lindbergh stepped away from previous generations’ vision of flight as a potentially redeeming power.

The apex of aviation’s developmental pyramid offered individuals at least the dream of sharing in the ecstasies of flight. That of space does not, but Anne found in it a cosmic apotheosis to which less privileged individuals might or might not respond.
The world that Anne posits at the end of *Earth Shine* is an organic one in which “the heron and the astronaut are linked in an indissoluble chain of life on earth.” She envisions an ideal chain and an ideal existence, but it is one lacking the compelling, vigorously democratic optimism that the winged gospel offered to the populace at large. Edenic nature and ecstatic spaceflight are laudable ideals—but they are equally unattainable for most in the contemporary world, and Anne’s embracing of them marks the end of the Golden Age of Aviation.