

From Orbit It Looked So Altered

From orbit it looked so altered:

curved edge graced with atmosphere,

a shadow ocean somber as a newborn's eye.

Continents mere drab dirt encrusted on the garden gazing ball.

No emblem of man to be seen.

On our return we found we were changed.

The oily recycled air had spoiled us , we could no longer breathe the toxins

in an ecosystem under no one's control.

The silent throbbing just outside our craft

ill prepared us for these pressing masses.

We began to meet almost nightly

to sit unspeaking, staring out curtained windows at sidewalks, streetlights, signposts.

Our wives said all their prepared words and retreated

into watchful worry,

Waiting for that sacred moment they knew would come.

One late August evening

hot rain pounded the steaming pavement and something came to life

so clearly we all shifted in accord—

But there was only us and our fretted spouses and the undeniable Idea.

We told ourselves at first how foolish even to imagine, in such times, they would agree to send us back.

We could not deny it. Destiny was exceeding escape velocity and the only joy we would ever find

rose high and light behind the thinning clouds.

The commander turned to politics.

He knew that if he could gain their trust

he could show them how it had to be

and they would build the monstrous engines

No matter what our small freedom would purchase.

And that was one.

The astronomer undertook religion.

He told us that enlightenment

had shown him his petty ambitions

Would never take him high enough to see the face of God.

What else is there? he asked us.

Where can I go that God is more than here?

I knew as surely as they that we were grounded.

My loyal family tested its patience on the anvil of my desperation until my return. These nights

I sit with my youngest looking at the rising

planets reflecting the sun's glory onto our darkness.

The last takes part in a different vision.

He remembers brilliant blue and the graced curving horizon.

He fills the dirty streets with his unanchored singing: unrhymed meterless carols to another world

with no emblem of man to be seen.

