

From orbit it looked so altered:
 curved edge graced with atmosphere,
 a shadow ocean somber as a newborn's eye.
Continents no more than 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 for breathing 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 soon had 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 crazy singing:
unrhymed meterless carols to another world
with no emblem of man to be seen.