

EARTHRISE

By Martin Westlake

On 21 December 1968,
In a daring escape,
Three men with a pocket calculator
Rode a roaring tower of 5.6 million parts
Into Floridean skies
And soared into expectant orbit.

While they gazed back at a world fast changing
From landscape to planet,
Gravity drove them,
Pebbles flung from Earth's sling,
Across the vast astrolabe
Towards their lunar destination.

Rushing slowly through utter loneliness,
They floated in their silvery dust speck,
Gliding and sliding along an invisible plane
Towards the moon's bright disk,
And there they hid in the black nothingness
Of the dark side.

Celestial tourists drifting back into light,
Their cameraed necks craning through fogged up windows,
They caught a target of opportunity,
A twin-filmed grain of rock floating with all its peoples,
A colourful, half-lit pendulum,
Swinging out from the moon's pockmarked cheek.

Borman, Anders and Lovell - the three exceptions,
Gazed at the rest of humanity in its distant invisibility,
Then fell a quarter of a million miles,
Bouncing on the atmosphere before streaking earthward,
An orange slash in a black piece of velvet,
Parachuting down to the Pacific's waves.

Man had been to the moon, but he had seen the earth,
Seen what gods saw, seen what gods made;
He had seen the earth rise,
Seen frontiers and races disappear.
And, just for a while, it seemed
That man would think as gods thought.

MARTIN WESTLAKE was born in Buckinghamshire (Amersham) and grew up in North West London (Harrow). He studied at University College, Oxford (BA), the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, Bologna Center (MA) and the European University Institute, Florence (PhD). He lived and worked in Italy and France before moving to Belgium (Brussels). He has worked for several European political organisations and institutions and is currently Secretary General of the European Economic and Social Committee. Martin is the author of a number of books and articles about British and European politics and institutions as well as a major biography of Neil Kinnock. He is also a budding poet and is currently working on an historical novel.