

Sleeping in Space

Not the super-cool and silent one, nor
the driven smartass. He's the nuts-and-bolts
and dockings man, the one with the smile
of an imp, the one who will be left
behind. Meanwhile
he marvels at the blue oasis Earth
unlooming by degrees outside Columbia's window.

He's set for isolation, ready for the solitary
flicking of switches, the plunge to the far side
and back, born again and reborn to circle in limbo.
He'll need to rest. How will he sleep?
Will he sleep? He will of course.

When he does, across some Houston screen
his heartbeat tramps like sturdy footfalls
 while through his unearthly dreams
swinging its umbilical trunk an elephant swaggers
moon-coloured as an Arab horse.

His dreams are lunar. He dreams an astronomer,
before the Age of Reason, who happens on
an elephant in the moon; dreams humiliation,
the pachyderm unmasked as nothing
 but a mouse
which squeezed between lenses inside
the telescope of the deluded man, and died.
 He dreams the Prophet,
arms raised, who draws the moon into his sleeve
then out and down the collar of his robe
and splits it in two silver plaits to east and west
to satisfy Habib the Wise.

 He dreams a lock of hair,
ravished and hidden in the moon among
other wastage of the world: an astronomer's pride,
some failed miracles, the lives of Apollo 1.
Until at last

 in the full emptiness of space
all things are isolated, crystallized to stars.