Some Thoughts on a Dancing Goddess

You are a graceful goddess, our Earth:

poised on tiny feet, powerfully hipped,

you sing a song of becoming as you dance,

full of Sun and Thunder.

I don't usually comment on my own poetry. Narcissism aside (guilty as charged), it violates a central canon of the New Criticism: a work of art needs to speak for itself. Moreover, I'm still too close to the composition of this piece to have reached the critical distance necessary to access its merits and flaws objectively.

Still, let me mention something that I would have noticed about the poem even if I hadn't written it myself. That it's not something I consciously put into the piece makes it that much more striking to me.

The ancestors would never have written this poem. Probably it could not (or at least would not) have been written before 1972, before those first iconic photographs of the Whole Earth from space.

One of the things that pleases me about this poem is its simultaneous evocation of Earth the planet and Earth the person: pole/equator/rotation = feet/hips/dance. While this may be how we think of Earth these days, it's certainly not how the ancestors would have seen her. To them, Earth was fixed center and paradigmatic stability. Although experientially this remains true for us today, we also bring to our praise of Earth a perspective the ancestors never had: the view from Outside. Happy we to stand at the convergence point of myth, metaphor, and scientific reality.

That said, let us ask the question familiar to every Poetry 101 student: Who is the speaker (or, rather, speakers: "*our* Earth") of this poem?

The first answer is obvious: the children of Earth. *We* are the speakers, praising our own mother planet. More specifically: we the *co ntemporary* children of Earth speak these words. Only we have the perspective to have seen her in this way, a god's-eye view that would have amazed the ancestors.

But another answer is possible. Who else, besides ourselves, would address Earth with such familiarity? I would suggest (and this I *certainly* didn't intend) that this could only be the other beings in our solar system: the Sun, the Moon, and of course Earth's siblings, her fellow planets.

These views are not mutually exclusive; rather, they function together. We, her family on Earth, praise her in company with her family in space. And is she not truly worthy of such praise, our Earth?

For all its traditional form and language, this is a very modern hymn to Earth: old and new at the same time.