

THE POEM IS SHOWING

Slowly, without embarrassment,
the poem composes the candles on the sideboard
to show how mortal our hands are,
putting down or picking up a glass,
fingering among the hors d'oeuvres,
or touching a friend's shoulder.

In the twilight of table lamps
and floor lamps which the poem invents
for the next room, how sadly
our skeletons show through
as we stand or sit, conversing
with a certain animation.

THE POEM DRESSES UP LIKE LOVE

The poem contrives to look as old
as love itself, Sappho in Merlin's white beard.
It questions the glum lover: So how did
your story end? I told her I was leaving her.
I couldn't tell her I knew she was leaving
me for her new lover. Your pride, was it?
(Stroking the beard.) My pride, yes. And besides
I didn't want her to hurt, even a little.

You ungrateful egotist, mutters the venerable
poem, you could have left her a small gift
of her guilt. What if she wants to remember you?