

## Visiting Poet

His agency books him into copybook college towns  
an hour's drive from the airport  
through suburban-show-and-tell with publicity  
directors full of 'how we've grown but held to standards.'  
He's given a room at the Inn  
with copies of *The New Yorker* and student publications,  
dines with department members who anthologize him  
while he thinks of garland gatherings,  
the literal meaning of anthology;  
wilted flowers, most literally, in this case.  
His meat is overdone.

Then to the carapace gymnasium and the rows of faces  
far too young. The introduction inflates  
an already disproportionate reputation,  
done not for him, of course, but for the college and the town.  
He reads, sounding his words  
as if someone else had written them, which nearly is the case,

for he seems literally someone else, wilted from his words.  
He includes his only recent poem  
on the death of a fellow of his school of verse  
and knows at once that a first reader of the  
journal to which he lends his euphonious name  
would reject it as unworthy.  
Yet the poor one this poor poem celebrates was once as young  
as any of these, as vaguely hungry  
and as scared. He reads his other poems, anthologizing  
himself now, and finishes with the well-known favorite  
requested by a senior member of the staff.  
Years and wars before a famous figure died  
reciting these stanzas in Spain.  
Now perfunctory applause from those  
who take up *Guernica* in Art Survey 140-B  
and who now try (as has he) to reconcile  
this frosting-haired figure before them with  
the glossed pictures of advanced publicity.  
It seems to him his public self was always advancing,  
while he somehow receded.

The evening ends on inanities over handshakes  
and blood-red punch. The yearbook photographer  
with a spring-growth beard records the day for college annals  
in a flash. In his room at the Inn the poet  
drinks brandy from a water tumbler,  
from the side opposite the toothpasted rim,  
counts out his pills, and turns in.  
He dreams of spring-growth-daffodil Oxford  
and of three deaths: a Spanish one, one  
more recent, and one to come, and of  
bright garlands bound with festering weeds.  
The next morning, having breakfasted lightly  
and read the hotel code on the back of his door,  
he's driven to the airport.  
After taking leave of the publicity director,  
whose handshake made the ring from  
a dead friend cut a poet's flesh,  
he stands needing a haircut and someone to hem  
the lining of his topcoat,  
thinking of a painter friend said to have  
rediscovered his early art's vitality by LSD.

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