

The Reading.

1. Before the Reading:

Furey stands at the toilet mirror,
Smooths an eyebrow, flecks of grey,
Hears the poet mutter in his cubicle,
Reshuffle his notes, another bout
Of nervous burps and a terminal groan.

Clink of a belt-buckle,
Hurried struggle with a coat,
He exits on the flush,
Looks neither left nor right.
Furey washes his hands.

2. After the Reading:

The poet spreads his shoulders wide,
Back-steps the bar, elbows set,
Deflects questions, but accepts drinks,
Keeps his replies short, but interesting.

He conveys an air of delicate ennui,
Contemplates his answers, chin pinched,
Stares at the floor and drinks deep,
Gives much away from the foothills of his life,
But leaves the peaks to their imagination.

He can sense his profile rising:

Imagines appearances on live TV,
Commissioned works for green events,
Calls many drinks for which others pay,
And counts them lucky in his gratitude.

He eyes the Masters student, who'd approached him earlier,
Drums up suggestions to her many needs,
The way her breast had brushed his sleeve,
Her gush at his poem on dislocation,
How she marvelled at its title: 'Somewhere-Else',
And misses the curve ball tossed low from Furey,
Asking how many collections has he written?

The poet grasps the Holy Grail of his latest pint,
Feigns hurried counting, though he knows,
Screws his eyes up to the low ceiling,
Holds his breath at the post-grad's quiver:
'Twenty-one collections and a long verse narrative,'
Feels his back foot slip at Furey's quickened cut:
'Would you say you're having trouble then, getting it right?'