

Icon

With his visit nearing its end,
he listens to their carefully spoken words:
irked by the fumble for gentility,
the oblique denial of class,
his discomfort bordering contempt.
Yet, in a vague way, he still fears them.

They sit with him in a room
where nothing changes.
Below a tapestry
depicting workers in a field
a hungering fire just touches November's chill.

Crystal and brass
gleam in cramped alcoves,
patterned china
softens a dresser's sombre lines.
The piano, tuned, polished,
and mute for twenty years,
stands rigidly obtrusive.

A meal is prepared and served
with the ritual care
of a lifetime's frugality.
Then, at his leaving,
he awaits the final irritation:
his father murmurs
as his mother moves to flick dust
from the dustless icon on the wall:
capped and gowned
his framed youth stares down at them,
the eyes uncertain.