The Poem Dresses up like Love

Earnest Sandeen
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?

Earnest Sandeen