

It's Hard Being a Famous Poet

1.

[the potlatch gift]

It's tough being a famous poet.
All your privacy is gone. It's
enough to drive a person crazy!
Even when people are not coming
up to you at pharmacies or liquor
stores and asking for an autograph,
they are giving you sidelong,
foxy glances, or purposely stepping
into your line of sight and pressing,
quickly, a dark and gristly substance
into their pouty mouths, then
(after counting to three) gagging it
back out, into blue, condom-like
objects, just to get a piece of your
chock-full time and attention.
Granted, those who do the gagging
trick are not normal, common people;
they are other poets. But this does not
make the distraction any less annoying,
not least when they approach you,
smiling, all nonchalant, holding the
squid-thing out to you, as a species
of potlatch gift.

2.

[the shower]

It sucks being a famous poet.
All your time gets taken up on
the phone or in answering emails
from people asking for a blurb,

and stuff. It's totally tiresome! Even when young, sexy people aren't pounding at your door in Paris, where you're on a grant, you'll be at the Tuileries, let's say, just walking around, and someone dressed in a kind of gold-leaf foil will invariably rush up, yank your head back by the hair, and snap a selfie with you. It's sort of like when the skies over the medieval college town, where you've been invited to read, in a vast dining hall, open up and soak you in this stuff that is like sooty sweat from the Great War, though when you look at your hands and feet, they are a viscous condom-blue, so that you have to go back to the dorm and take a shower, in a common shower room, with a bunch of students and profs with brass chorus masks who have followed you there, and you take a shower with all these naked people in masks who are looking at you and chanting something you can't even understand, you know what I mean?

3.

[the "everything is so beautiful"]

It's taxing being a famous poet. All your energy gets completely sucked up. It's so frustrating! People are always asking you for letters of recommendation, or inviting you to do readings, or to teach in Summer Retreats at Napa, or Naropa, or Naples, Florida. It's exhausting! Not to mention

the ceaseless invitations abroad, where you have to give even more readings than you do in your own country, and then do long interviews with the press, which is censored in some of the places where you get invited, by people wearing small blue condoms on their fingers, and where many poets are in jail, and their books are banned, and even more people get thrown in the slammer for reading them, though that doesn't stop you, for you are a famous poet and must strive to stay that way, countless folks are counting on you, and plus, the honorarium is just too good, it's more than even the Poetry Foundation pays, so you go and you say, in this interview, published in a sanctioned magazine of one of these countries, where dozens of poets and artists are locked up, that "Everything is so beautiful." Though after a while the pressure just keeps piling up in your head and soul, so you try to find ways to get around the ridiculous demands on your time and space, the way it all drains the spirit, and so you go to this reading in your honor, and you read this long poem that you've copied from the autopsy report of the poet Liu Xiaobo, the Nobel Peace Prize guy, who has just died in jail, from liver cancer, except you move, for effect, a line from the top of the report to the end, which is a line that says his genitals are unremarkable, which is something the censors sort of like, and they invite you back next year, too,

to tour with some of the still-living legends
of the “Language movement.”

4.

[the gyre]

It's tough being a famous poet.
All your creative juices get drained
into answering solicitations from
journals and presses and with traveling
to conferences and with judging book
contests and with doing tenure reviews
for other poets who want to be famous
too. It's just so tiresome! Sometimes it
gets to be so much you just want to pull
a huge blue condom over yourself and
roll down a hill and over the edge of
a sheer cliff, or whatever, and vanish,
until all the glaciers melt again, and
some survivor of the Catastrophe who
is wandering there, hunting for giant
sloth, sees a little bit of blue poking
out from under a rock. But you don't
do that, and you keep your mouth shut
about other things that can't be named
in the Poetry Field, because you know
that the Future is counting on you,
the future of Art. It is tough and hard,
but you must persevere beyond the
pressures and all the silly resentments
of the less famous poets, whose lives
and writing will end up mostly, if not
completely, forgotten, like the fate of
the common people, who live in the
bayou, beyond the University District.
The skies open up above you but it's

not for sooty sweat, like in the Great War. You are covered in a gold-leaf light, now, as you head out to the stage, where four-thousand poets are packed into a huge room at an annual networking convention, to hear you recite, in the Russian or the TED style, without benefit of notes or book. They are all wearing dark bird masks, with long, curlew-beaks, pecking rapidly at some dark and gristly substance that is cupped in their hands, a tell that indicates excitement and expectation. And so you spread your arms and begin, as a wire and harness pull you above the flock of pecking poets, and you fly, higher and higher, faster and quicker, in ever widening gyre, while the G-forces stretch and flatten your reciting face, like you're in a House of Mirrors, but you're not, you're just at a Poetry Convention, it feels like your face is going to tear off. It's hard being a famous poet.

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