

Basketball Player and Friends

Here is a young man sitting
With his teammates for a college
Yearbook photo, bony-shouldered
In his crested singlet and plain
White shorts on a front row bench
And looking, even though he and
All these were substituted sixty
Years ago, pretty much at home. This
May be because he has never entirely
Assented to being done with
All this, this bench, these three rows
Of young men staring out just as he is
Staring out, as soberly; and it may be
Only because the things he and these
Young men know, things so
Unequivocal in sunlight once, now
Hidden in endless night —

- Long trajectory of the first throw
Into the empty
Gym, thudding vibrations of
Ball off rim —
- Morning the bus broke down
Outside Kingston, horsing around
In the zero morning, that Meds' guard's
Incredible limericks —
- Perfectly-understood slight
Tilt of a head, feint of a body
Trotting up the floor —

— Are by their own admissions so
Unsuitable for what's coming,
Unsayable to shapes idling closer
Though far ahead still, that
What we have here is
One of those billions of
Caves below words
People live in all over the place,
Fine by me of course, better than
Most of the language-caves I have
Walked around in, though not all,
But than any of them much
Sadder. Sadder because of its
Harmlessness, so-early abandoning back there,
And its tightlipped *Verbot* against
Any kind of claiming of worth,
Though only averagely sad because of what it
Does *not* show. It does not show
This young man getting up from this
Bench to marry, to put on the quasi-innocent
Khaki of 1914, to drive thereafter through
Small-town decades to the same office, or,

Now that all of that is done with, to
Watch TV, make foolish and repetitive
Errors in conversation, sleep in
Stained bedclothes, or get letters from
Comparative strangers who happen
To be relatives in need of
Cash telling him how they love him
Best. It does not show any of
This. No, it shows him still here
With his teammates, all of them on
The frail bark bounding forward
On the dark wave, and all watching out
Into the high-lifting dark,
How life will be, patiently
With their camera-concentrated
Guileless unprophetic eyes.

DON COLES