Time - 7

The Sandhill Cranes of Nebraska

By Billy Collins (American, born 1941)

Too bad you weren’t here six months ago,
was a lament I heard on my visit to Nebraska.
You could have seen the astonishing spectacle
of the sandhill cranes, thousands of them
feeding and even dancing on the shores of the Platte River.

There was no point in pointing out
the impossibility of my being there then
because I happened to be somewhere else,
so I nodded and put on a look of mild disappointment
if only to be part of the commiseration.

It was the same look I remember wearing
about six months ago in Georgia
when I was told that I had just missed
the spectacular annual outburst of azaleas,
brilliant against the green backdrop of spring

and the same in Vermont six months before that
when I arrived shortly after
the magnificent foliage had gloriously peaked,
Mother Nature, as she is called,
having touched the hills with her many-colored brush,
a phenomenon that occurs, like the others,
around the same time every year when I am apparently off
in another state, stuck in a motel lobby
with the local paper and a styrofoam cup of coffee,
busily missing God knows what.
