

MY AUNTS AND UNCLES

i was once so close to them
that i have to be a long ways from them now.
my mother was one of fourteen siblings
from whom i was the only next generation.
that may be, for better or worse,
the central fact of my life.
at a distance of three thousand miles,
they are still wonderful to me,
without the threat of tyranny,
and i am less of a disgrace to them.

but those who survive are oh so old.
my aunt pat is nearly ninety
and down to eighty pounds.
claire and terese and ann louise
have all had cataracts.
my sturdy, factotum uncles
fear loneliness and crowds.

are those really all that are left?
my god, those are all who are left.

one who is dead now once said
and the rest subscribed to it,
"they should have taken us out
as we reached sixty-five
and shot us."
but they're of irish country stock,
and everything dies before the heart.
their very strength condemns them to slow deaths.

they wonder why i haven't been back in so long.
there have been many reasons,
but the only one right now
is that i (who, irish in my fashion,
drank away what little of their strength i once had)
am afraid i will start crying
and not stop.

FATHERS AND SONS

my little boy says to me,
"you wouldn't be mad at blake,
if she'd said the same thing i did."

and i say, "i make every effort
to be the same towards both of you."

and he says, "well, you don't succeed,"

and i feel myself starting to heat up,

and then something stops me,

and i think about it,

and i think about how hard i was

on his half-brother, my first son,

and i say, "you may be right.

i think it's because fathers, rightly or wrongly,
feel more responsible for their sons becoming men
than for their daughters becoming women.

they can do a lot of things with and for their daughters,
and they can love them and take pride in them
and give them every encouragement,
but they can't, especially by example,
teach them how to become women.

so when we fathers see weaknesses in our sons

that are not our own,

we are intolerant of them,

and when we see our sons perpetuating
our own weaknesses,

then we could not feel sadder or more helpless,
and we blame these feelings on our sons.

i think you may be right;

i'm sorry if i was unfair."

i realize this is the first time

i have ever admitted to him

that i was unfair

although i've never found it impossible
to apologize to his sister,

and i sit there watching my son
begin to become a man.

SHE DIDN'T LIKE US MUCH EVEN BEFORE THE AYATOLLAH

i go to the office on friday afternoon
to pick up the mail
and there in the campus paper
is a report of kate millett's address
on thursday afternoon.

i missed the presentation,
as did most of the male student body,
because it conflicted with the world series.