

## 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.