

## The Fathers

Though dead twelve years my father returns,  
drawn by our preparations for a new child,  
my father who has hungered more years than I know  
for the father in me. He is shy at first, gentle,  
unsure of his welcome. But when he settles  
in the armchair, looks at me and begins to talk

I notice he has brought with him  
the image he carved  
of his own father, of life: a frowning  
mask, unflinching rage, fixed  
in a wooden aspiration he never  
expected I would turn on him  
the years before his death.

I set the mask, handed down through the fathers,  
almost as large as the house,  
against a wall, its savage eyes staring,  
not seeing, and at their splintered edges  
frightened. I tend to my father.

He is tired. I hold him after his long journey,  
listen to his windy miseries, my shortcomings,  
his head in the crook of my arm. He talks, and talks  
until he falls asleep.