

## Men at the Wake

They carry themselves behind steely eyes.

The women,  
modest housewives and widows carrying wads  
of tissue well beyond their point  
of saturation; always taught not to take more  
than they will need, to make more with less,  
like a coupon with no expiration date.

The men  
stand poised, one hand casually pocketed,  
the other ready to grasp another's in a ceremonial  
display, a camaraderie of death as the firmness of  
the grip measures the degree of condolence;  
the number of shoulder slaps measures the degree  
of sincerity in the one glistening eye.

They think  
they know themselves well, know all the other  
golfers and fisherman milling around with hands  
outstretched, while the women keep the children  
silent and oblivious.

They walk  
into the cold night in a moment of contrition,  
thinking maybe they should consider writing  
their own eulogy.

## Flashin Leather

In your dreams you continue  
to covet a young lover's  
supple skin; you continue  
to ache with nostalgia for  
the French tongue of  
a Thalian queen.

You have forgotten that  
I yearn for your touch  
in the dark and dank  
basement beside a box  
of warped 45's and  
rusted fishing reels.

I am not a lover's photo.  
I am not beyond my  
days of appeal.  
You once said that  
baseball was better  
than sex.

So slip your fingers into  
my waiting leather and I  
will be your supple lover.  
Curl my fingers and oil  
up my pocket; I will ease  
all of your aches.

Slide me over the knob  
of your Adirondack ash  
and carry me as high  
as the midday sun.

## Razing the Sanatorium

I asked Mr. Atkins why it must come down.  
He revved down his yellow Caterpillar and  
said "It's likely to fall down soon anyway."  
I asked why it couldn't be restored.  
"Listen" he said. "This is Sullivan County,  
not exactly *the land of plenty*."

And so it crumbled to the pungent loam,  
scattering the breathless spirits as they  
whispered their farewells to Dr. Loomis,  
who turned over just once, forever  
untethered from the curse of consumption  
that took him before his dream became a reality.

And so it crumbled in some fitting fashion,  
like a bridge that is no longer safe,  
erected to heal the afflicted urban dwellers  
while the fear and rumors spread like  
a wild fire to the healthy hotel business  
and mountain hideaways.

And so it crumbled under the weight of  
emptiness and modern medicine.  
Once a soothing breath of air to ease  
the cough and night sweats, now  
the last vestige of the Silver Age  
hauled away to the county land fill.

## Slow Dance

I led you across the smooth  
hardwood floor on an early  
Sunday morning.

I wore my striped winter  
Waldo socks and you  
donned provocative flannel.

We danced like banished  
fools aboard The Flying  
Dutchman.

I was the Thin Man and  
you were Nora, solving the  
mystery of the English Waltz.

With each step slower than the  
last, our grizzled timelines  
began to fade.

I sang a song to you while  
you held on for fear  
of falling fast.

But we kept the tempo slow,  
forever swaying with every  
pitch and yaw.

Were it not for the Wind

The white noise of the rustling ash and hickory  
would not slow down every minute of a late  
August afternoon; the hackberry would not  
abort its overabundance of that which has  
grown old.

The small leaves of the spidery cleome  
would not shimmer and tremble like  
a migrating school of silver minnows;  
the tubular chimes would hang limply like  
broken bones and broken wings.

The cold rain would stay longer; the lace  
curtains would not be a billowing sea swell  
or the ethereal movement of a peasant's dress;  
there would be no dancing ferns and sailing  
water lilies.

Were it not for the wind the shadows would not  
morph like time-lapse photography of cumulus  
clouds, valley fog and the graying of old men and  
old dogs; there would be only silence and no  
maestro in the sky.