

RONALD WILCOX

MEMORIAL DAY, 1978

Morning

My father's body sounds,
those noises keeping him alive,
I hold dear and dumb, my own:
his son's heart pounds
as if doing will always thrive
and time calling names alone
will keep the pat breath
easing in and surely out
and there's the rub, saying it.
He woke early; death
stirred beside him without
a word, neither betraying it:
the old fear of ceasing.
He's not afraid, just knows,
as I do, the sum of things;
yet I measure the leasing

RONALD WILCOX is writing novels in Ogden, Utah. His first, *The Rig*, has been published by Tower Publications.

of my life as it goes
by me in my father's coughings,
conversations of the body
with itself, letting the past
breathe again soft against
itself in the throat, to die
as if by practicing the last
breath in solace of the breast
he could give it back
to himself, start over new,
pretending it happens that way,
like play-acting Jack and
the beanstalk, climbing to
heaven hand over hand,
breathing yesterday today.

Afternoon

We walked among the graves
looking for the names
matching our own last name
to those long out of sight,
playing the kind of games
we play out to the end, apparently.
He walked straight and tall, my father,
looking for his mother
like a boy who had stayed out too long
wanting permission to come home.
I'll never forget it; I was proud.
He had forgotten where the marker was.
He asked a young family for directions.
They knew the answer no more
than he did but looked for him.
A child found it, his mother's name,
came running, "Sir! Sir!"
They showed him. They were proud
they had helped him. I stood

watching over him protectively
as he read the names: his mother,
his sister, his brother. Another,
the name of the man his other
sister, still alive, drove to suicide;
an early grave. A secret.

We spoke of it; it still puzzled him.
My father's buried elsewhere, he said.

We moved on, not speaking now.
Later, another graveyard: Mother.
My mother. His wife. Still a girl
in his eyes, fresh as flowers.

One stone: two names.
Hers, completed with dates.
His, an open interval
to be dated later. Who knows
the numbers to be? Not I. Not he.

Evening

His head bends forward
as into the mirror of his life,
seeing all that went before
infinitely future tense.

He sleeps softly in front of the TV.

Softly snores, occasionally.

We had a big day today.'

I cut his hair quietly
this morning, preparing the day,
neatly clipped, a best suit,
clean shirt, new garments.

I look into his face
as I would my own
years hence, I being lucky.
Narcissus knew himself
as another, a stranger.

I wonder if he will outlast me,
even now, at eighty-four,
forty years my senior.

I wish I could collect
myself, my thoughts . . .
He wakes, he smiles. I love him.
Why were we made to feel
what we cannot understand?

Night

Silence now,
as if he's gone:
He sleeps in the bedroom
he and Mother shared,
wraps in rough blankets,
gets cold easily,
remembers nothing
of now, knows the world
as it was then, intimately,
as he knew her.
Sleeps soundly.
I sit in front of
late night TV, waiting for
something to happen, soon, story
interrupted at intervals
for messages.
I doze. I wake up.
Woke myself breathing
too hard. I am older.
I fell asleep.
TV proceeded without me.
I wait for messages.
I am alive.
The TV smiles.