

MARY JANE WHITE

For My Father and His Mother

Why do I never write about my father?
Younger, he was a quiet, religious son—handsome then as Elvis,
Who has never spoken much about his brothers.

Mom, (and always I asked her) *what cousin or other*
Relative of ours is this?—hoping one might be distant enough—to kiss.
Why does he hardly ever speak about his brothers? . . .

That was a question I didn't ask, even of her,
Who told me they were older, and how each died, once or twice.
Why do I never write about my father?

Whose own father died somehow, sometime in there—
My father, Tom, nineteen—all his elders, gone in eighteen months.
Why does he never speak about his brothers?

His own father? Who now ever says their names? Not grandmother.
Presbyterian, patrician, un-remarried—is her heart like his?
Why do I never write about my father?

If I do—here—with some restraint—I'm still afraid I'll stir
His old deaths up—that have—and might again—ravage us to silence.
Why do I never just write about my father?
Why does he hardly speak about his own, or his brothers'?