

## *Children at the Wake*

JOHN GREY

I admit that, more than once,  
I've pointed to the sky,  
said "That's where your grandpapa  
is now . . . with the angels."  
Years ago, uncles, aunts, did the same to me.  
It's a family heirloom  
handed down through the generations.  
The explanation must look like  
something from a picture book . . .  
clear blue sky, maybe a puffy cloud  
or two for a chaise lounge,  
and a broad sun beaming down  
like God's smile.  
If I didn't have these standby stories,  
then death would be a stammer of the tongue.  
I'd speak to the child like I do to myself . . .  
he's been called to God  
but what that means I do not know.  
The more inquisitive ask,  
"If he's in heaven in the sky,  
then who's that lying in the coffin  
at the undertakers?"

That's when my philosophy  
feels like the body,  
stiff and speechless.  
My faith can raise it from the dead  
but not my words.  
"Your mother's looking for you,"  
I tell them, as I move toward the safety  
of the grown-up mourners.  
We know that really isn't anyone  
who's lying there.  
But I can't explain nothing to a child.  
I can only point to the sky,  
its nearest equivalent.