

# Still Photographs

*by* George L. Chieffet

## Still Photographs

My grandfather in his prime could out shout  
The Tigers of Wrath -- Phillip Levine

With lapel carnations blooming  
across their reproachful beards  
the legends slouch to nowhere in horse hair sofas,  
having out paced their famine years they settle and snore  
while Turkish carpets flower under their shoes. And those shoes!  
High topped, blunt-toed, scuffed and chewed:  
my uncles squint toward America's golden streets.  
Their shaved skulls glare like tombstones  
while self-important cousins pace under oiled pompadours  
one will become a tobacco king;  
another will steal copper plumbing on moonless nights.  
Their smug profiles adorned with mustaches and polished teeth  
rub away Christmas sweets.  
We all wait for the great aunt, stout as a potato.  
She lost her way and died smothered in a snow bank.  
The barbed wire scrawl of old hands  
behind a gandy curtain draw us to embrace  
winter cold on heavy coats. But they will never travel;  
tread in steerage; cross an ocean. They will never come at all.  
For they reside in paper rooms with overhead fans, in mahogany  
boxes where coffee and crullers are served at their backs;  
our good china rests on their serious collars. Their rings are  
retired.  
And somewhere in the heat of the attic their faces are turning  
white.

