

Poetry Series

Seamus O' Brian
- poems -

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Seamus O' Brian()

2009

Cypress trees in silence tower; through
unstirred branches sunlight pours,
liquid blades of golden water
knife their way through leafy dams.

The swing creaks; its rusty springs
my therapist now. The cool
breeze unafraid to touch me
softly, almost like affection,
not unlike mercy.

Placid beams of light warm my hand
in its languid grip of the rusted chain.
The arc of listless toes sun-bared swing
through the coolness of April's indifference.

The sun and breeze brush my skin
a leper shunned by all who fear
the disease in my heart, the knife in my hand
but these angels of mercy fall unmoved
from one acquainted well with the gates of hell
that yawn within this leper's heart, black and fell.

Skyward, my eyes discover
tender green shoots of the cypress monarchs
swaying gently now, dancing in the warmth.

I hear a whisper in the breeze.

Perhaps it says, 'Spring'

but it could be,
'forgiven...'

For spring comes to lepers, too.

Seamus O' Brian

534 Lancaster

The old house died quietly
under the white hot eye
of the Florida sun,
not quite gallantly bearing
a few windows splinted
with snail-trailing boards.

A few fractured panes billowing
unspoken shame—like skin clinging
hospital gowns, their remnants
of table cloth, once
courtiers of raucous holiday
feasts, and patches of bed sheets
whose memories of tickled children
laughing, love-kindled whispers
evaporated like rain in the kiln-
baked gutters of Lancaster Street.

Joints and ligaments sigh
With particulate expirations
of quiet disintegration,
as flies helicopter above
the tragedy, and Levites
pass by on the other side.

The necrosis of floor boards-
festering, ulcerating,
under-sink cavities,
facilitate the transmission
of foot-padded, whiskering pathogens.

Under the blast of the Jacksonville
sky, ribbons of paint push
off from the wall, tendrils of ivy
ascend from the soil.

Humidly June, frosty December
paint crawls away; ivy
cracks beams and the memory

of chatter dissipates into
the sun-slanting dust
of long empty rooms.

Silence.

Decay.

A home
in death.

Crack the chest,
open the door.
A hand laid softly
upon an old pine floor.
She looks up to his face,
her eyes quote her heart
'I think there's still hope.'

And the house hears again
the sound of a voice
the touch of a hand,
and on Lancaster Street
the old house is breathing,
living once more.

Seamus O' Brian

A Beautiful Place

I experienced a vision today
On Goodlette-Frank Road
Which is itself an unusual event—
The occurrence, not location—
At that point in my coffee
Where it's too cold for enjoyment
Yet too voluminous to ignore
With any real satisfaction.

Yet to the point, my vision
Was of you, good writer,
As you held out your looped
Wand of poetic creation
Spinning in the light of your
Poetic muse, great bubbles
Of glistening verse forming
Voluptuously, clinging to
Your wand as you spun
Then releasing to shimmer
In the sunlight, and drift high
Glimmering shards of
sunlight-infused beauty
piercing all who beheld.

And then another scene,
An event of some import
Indicated by the rigid
Regimentation of black
Cloth knotting the necks
Of those who exhale
Vacuous flattery with
The effortless comfort
Of a smoldering cigarette.
A solemnity reinforced
by the tink-tink of champagne flutes
dancing the histrionics of the
melodramatic embrace,
and something more than
Rigidly submissive breasts of chicken.

Right—to the task—good poet,
I shall, for there you were, and I,
Sharing the thunderous acclaim
Of the culturally advanced, erudite set
Artfully accomplished, but fickle at best
That glint in your eye bid my ear to your lips
'I am here on this stage,
For the kind words you spoke
Aroused in my heart the strength of belief
That my art was a craft of worth to pursue.
Thank you, kind sir.'
'The favor returned, if you'll lend me your ear
For, as you are where you are is why I am here,
For the love of your craft, the stroke of your pen
Aroused in my heart a desire to create
Something more than flat words
asleep on the page
to walk in the realm of language on fire.
Thank you, kind lady.'

Now far from the vision
of that glamorous fare,
Far from the din of the
Self-congratulating, non-deprecating
Intentionally obfuscating
Tangential at best,
Erudite crowd,
I see my fair artist
At work at her desk
'I've published no books,
Won no awards, yet you
Still take the time to
Read all my verse,
Scribble kind words
In reply to my work.
Thank you, kind sir.'
'Nay, fair lady,
With each word from your heart,
With each dream that you gently
Pluck from the air
And pin to the page

With the gift of your pen
You have touched the wide world
With the gift of your art.
So dance with your muse,
Raise your wand to the sky
Let the light of the sun
Pierce through your heart,
And glimmering shards
of your magical verse
Will fall to the page
As the world becomes,
Word by word,
A more beautiful place.

'Thank you, fair lady,
thank you.'

Seamus O' Brian

A Fair Question

If the man I was
Twenty years ago
Met the man I am today,
What are the odds
that he would say,
In his evaluation of me,
"That's the kind of man
I hope someday to be? "

Seamus O' Brian

A Father's Prayer

You are my floating lanterns.

I pray that you have escaped,
distilling from me whatever
residue of grace was breathed
into me when matter became
this soul, when the fingerprint
of God smudged this fractured clay,
when the breath of heaven
somehow condensed onto
the warped mirror of who I am.
I pray that once released,
you float beyond the gravitational
pull of the orbit I have created by
the nucleation of this assortment
of surface binding inadequacies,
the accumulation of frailties and
omissions I have called life.

I pray that those few particles
that history and ultimate Divinity
may label the best of me
find their way into you, and
that the overwhelmingly
underwhelming rest of me
evaporates into the light of
a sun which will lead you
higher than I have ever gone.

I pray that all of the struggles
I have floundered through with
this creviced soul will find you,
augmented by the same grace
that propelled the ungainly craft
of my turbulent existence,
more sufficiently prepared and
more adequately forewarned
to brave the valleys
and gain the summits

of the terrain superimposed
upon the existence
that you will call life.

I let you go with the breath
Of hope releasing slowly,
slowly,
as your flight to the stars
begins.

Father of the winds,
Watcher of the sparrows,
carry my little lanterns
securely to their place
in your great journey.

Little lanterns, fly away,
fly away to the heights
I have never known
but ever longed to see.

Father of the winds,
carry these fragile lights
safely to the high places
where they will become
the luminaries you envisioned
at the birth of time.

Little lanterns, you have illuminated
the days of my life
with love and wonder,
now fly away and whisper to me
what the world is like
from the heights you climb.

Seamus O' Brian

A Good Husband

this blood on my hands
is it mine or yours

hold still let me take
my knife from your back

its what a good husband does

Seamus O' Brian

A Lullaby For My Children

Hush your cries, my child
Close your eyes, my child,
Go to sleep my little one.

The sun is gone;
The stars are out;
The moon is shining
Through the clouds

So hush your cries,
And close your eyes,
And go to sleep, my little one

Seamus O' Brian

A Meditation Of The Lord's Supper

'For as long as you eat this bread, and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.'

You proclaim the Lord's death.

You do not salvage the relevance of His death from the redundancy of the centuries; you proclaim it.

You do not rescue His death from the threat of trivialization; you proclaim it.

You do not release His death from the repetition of rote religiosity; you proclaim it.

He never asked for pyramids to be built, for magnificent cathedrals to be erected, for a crystal sarcophagus inlaid with gold, for splinters of his cross to be carried around in gold inlaid chests.

He asked to be remembered with bread and wine.

Why? Why, when the rulers of this world demand grand memorials, why did the Ruler of rulers and the King of kings ask for bread and wine?

Why after eating crackers and juice for 2,000 years does He not need me to rescue the relevance of His death?

It is because across the vast constellation of the innumerable deaths that mark the panoply of the entire history of humanity, the death of Jesus Christ stands alone, separate, absolutely unique and singular.

A few weeks ago my daughter stood in this very spot and proclaimed this very thing. Perhaps it was the quietness of her manner; perhaps it was the very novelty of her speech, but she was heartsick to hear that the words she spoke evoked in some who listened consternation that obscured the very point she was trying to make.

But we can't miss that point. That point is absolutely essential.

That point lies at the very heart of why we have been doing this for 2,000 years.

You see, there have been in the course of history many notable deaths. Many noble, and ignoble deaths. Countless famous, infamous, and un-noticed deaths.

Deaths that had great impact. The assassination of Abraham Lincoln. The death of Joseph Stalin. The death of John F. Kennedy, Adolf Hitler. The deaths of Martin Luther King and Mother Teresa.

The deaths of thousands of young men who stormed the beaches of Normandy.

The deaths of a few young men who stormed the cabin of Flight 93, preventing it from falling upon the White House.

The deaths of terrorists who flew their planes into the towers and the Pentagon.

Deaths that shaped the future of nations, and changed the course of history itself.

Ahh....but with this bread and with this wine we proclaim a death unique from all other deaths. We celebrate the death of One who not only changed the course of history, but whose death altered all of eternity.

The One who lay down his own life willingly, and in so doing destroyed death itself.

The One who trampled the gates of hell and set the captives free.

The One who tore the veil that separated God from man, so that every man might enter into the Holy of Holies and behold the face of God.

The One whose death caused the gates of Heaven itself to cry out, 'Who is this King of Glory? Who is this King of Glory? '

'The Lord, strong and mighty. The Lord of Hosts, the Lord strong and mighty.'

The Lord God Almighty, whose death upon that tree opened the gates of heaven that man might enter in and live in the presence of his Creator forevermore.

And he doesn't need my inspiring speeches to perpetuate the relevance of His death.

He doesn't need me to say just the right words to salvage His death from

obscurity.

In fact, He doesn't need me at all.

I should be able to set this cracker and this juice on my table at home, all alone, and be moved to examine my heart in relation to His desires for my life.

To cry out, 'Search my heart, Oh, God, and see if there be in me any wicked way! '

When I consider that these simple elements represent God wrapping Himself in human flesh, walking among us, and giving Himself for us—that God died for me—then I should be moved to worship and thanksgiving.

If, in such contemplation, I find that I am not so moved, then it is not because the person in this position has not been inspiring enough, and it is not because the worship team failed to adequately perform their duties.

No, it is likely because my heart has become hard, and my eyes have become dull.

Father, soften my heart so that when I hear the words of your son, 'This bread is my body, broken for you, take and eat, ' I will take and eat with a thankful heart, joyfully proclaiming the death of One who died in my place, and will return one day to establish peace and righteousness forever.

To take the cup, and hear his voice, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, that which wipes out every accusation against you; that which cleanses you from all unrighteousness; that which writes the name of God upon your heart for all eternity, ' as I raise my little cup and my little piece of bread to the heavens and proclaim the death that makes all death irrelevant.

Seamus O' Brian

A Promise

A man is made of dirt,
About him clings the scent of earth,
Mossy darkness, animals.
A soul enmeshed in trees and swamps
And sky.

Beneath society's disguise
A furtive creature hides,
With quickened pulse and
Rapid breath beneath the trees
In search of prey.

A man is made to run,
To swim the blackened pools and climb
The thundering heights.
To gaze across the waves
And go.
A man is made to hunt, to fight,
To smell of forest deeps.

And most unlikely,
Disconcertingly,
A man is made
To love a woman.

To pause upon the precipice,
And turn again toward the one
Who claims him as her own.
To hunt for one and kill for two
To think of her upon the ground,
And see her in the summer stars.

So clean the dirt and hide the scent,
And know as certain as I must
Return to wood and field and sky,
I will not go so far that I
Cannot return again to you.

A Sock

There is a sock on the ground
a brief reminder that somewhere
a foot is afoot without a sock;
a foot in intimate discourse
with a leg, ambulating perhaps
a body, or then again, perchance
hooked supine over a flexed
other leg
terminating in
another sock.

Like this one.

A sock, a foot, a leg,
a body, a child
running, perhaps wildly
one-socked through the sprinklered
yard, a hilariously independent
machination, inconceivably
half-drawn from a single cell
of my donation.
Grown to this sock-size
from the ingestion
of the fruit of the soil
and the sweat of my brow.
A sock, disconnected from the whole
is meaningless, but the whole; now that;
is the whole of my world.

Seamus O' Brian

A Spring Without A Winter

In the sparkling laughter of youth
The music of carefree hearts
And the gleam of unburdened eyes
the melodious echoes of a brook
Splashing and cascading
Under the glint of an April sun
If I am quiet and listen
I can hear the memories
of a spring without a winter.

Seamus O' Brian

A Sunset, Somewhere

Memories small and discretely dark
Drift across the horizon of my mind
Seabirds drifting across a tapestry
Of muted, breath-frosted fire smudged
across a passive horizon sliding
into a hungry sea, devouring fire,
engorging the azimuth of starry flame
without a wisp of steam, without
regard to the far driftwood shores
unseen but sunken beneath
the slick black gleam of a seabird's eyes.
The gulf between the sea
And the awakening stars
Swallows the light and then the thought
Of the gulls huddled and still, staring blankly
At seabirds still in flight.
The memory of what I once called home
Drifts silently across my mind,
Small and discretely dark.

Seamus O' Brian

A Year Of Newness

There may be nothing new under this sun
But within the roaring furnace of heaven
Above, who slings gargantuan worlds around
Her unblinking diadem with the easy silence
Of space, two solitary protons who have endured
Unchanged the aeons that have crumbled mountains
And parched oceans on worlds unseen by eyes of dust,
Yet, unmoved, have witnessed the bellowing incinerators
Of Elysium prick the blackness of vast nothingness
With their pupils through which gaze the fires of Sheol,
Only to collapse and exhale with their death
The luminous breath of heaven's nebulae;
Who have, waiting, unaltered since the vast shout
Of becoming, referenced Big Bang by some on this
Speck of flotsam adrift on infinity's ocean and others
The voice of the Divine calling forth the being of light;
Yes, waiting, unaltered while continents drift
And empires arise, erect monuments to their
Enduring magnificence, and return, both rulers
And monuments to the forgotten silence
Of the dust from which they arose. Still they
Wait while volcanoes give birth to islands,
Glaciers march, oceans freeze, mountains
Rise and fall to the rhythm of tectonic impulse,
And still they wait, while languages and worlds
Are born and die the ignoble death
Of the callous indifference of time.
And yet they wait, since they have
Since eternity gave birth to time itself
To collide at this very moment,
Two protons in the intercourse of
The atom become one helium,
And release one photon of light,
which flies with the winged
Feet of Apollo across eight minutes
Of nothing to skim the horizon of earth
And strike the retina of my eye,
And I see the dawn of 2017.
And there is nothing new under this sun

But the eternal newness of the light
Which brings us life and gives us reason
To hope.

Seamus O' Brian

After The Shower- Haiku

Down the branch it crawls
Catching sunlight as it falls
Glisten, drop of rain

Seamus O' Brian

Aftermath

Sometimes in the background
Almost imperceptibly
It glides through the rooms
Of my soul
Fluttering a curtain,
Rattling the blinds,
Turning a page in a discarded
Book—oh, yes—
Something of a mess
In here.
Quite a storm that was.
Chaos of a tortured soul and all that.
Betrayal, Rage, Fear,
Love, Pain, Regret.
Usual suspects.
Nothing new under that sun.
Still sneaks up on me though,
Cold breath on my neck.

But sometimes with a fury
That shakes the very walls,
Driving that bitter rain through
Fissures and cracks-
A blast of icy needles
Aimed at the eyes and the heart.
Back against the wall,
Head in my knees
Some solace found because
Shaking sobs can't be heard
In a hurricane of guilt and shame.

A worried question, paused,
Can the roof of this soul fly
Away?

Seamus O' Brian

Alive

I am alive.
I breathe, I eat
I reproduce.

But am I an arrow
Cast by the cosmos
At some, perhaps
Elusive, target
Whose flight
Is a thread
Drawn through the loom
Of time,
That crucible
Of stars
And pyre
Of heavens?

So that some
Unseen but
Seeing eye
Might look upon
My thread
In the tapestry
Of eternity
And grimly nod?

Or am I
A meteoric
Fireball falling
Through the atmosphere
Being consumed
By my own
Existence
A streak of light
Against the night
A fractile of time
That could
Be missed
Altogether

In a blink
And gone?

I am alive.

I long to burn
Against the sky
A streak of white
that floats away
in the breeze
and causes men
to lift their
eyes to heaven
and ask

why

I am alive.

Seamus O' Brian

All The Pain It Did Not Choose

the hollowness of silence
leaning a planetary weight
against the lightless cavity
of a heart's entrenched abode.
Carried about in this tissue
sarcophagus, shackled in darkness
enslaved to its sleepless toil,
laboring without rest, without pause
across the weave of seasons
and the knotting of decades
stretching this tapestry from
the antecedent blackness of
its master's own awareness,
to the dark edge of eternity,
never a gleam of beauty
to fall upon it, never the kiss
of rain or breath of autumn's frost,
never the brush of lover's fervor,
but only ever chained
to the will of a mind
whose choices bring upon it
every plunge of sickening fear,
every arrow shaft of love-sick
glaciated oblivion, every piercing
thrust of agonizing shame;
such tremble through a heart
which bears in quivering silence
the sum of all pain
found in paths
it had no will to choose.

Seamus O' Brian

Amygdala's Curse

Words of poetry tumble,
more like tears clumsily
splashing the ground
from the siphoning of my heart
than some human imitation of art;
at times they rise
like the ovation of my soul
against the curtain of dawn,
or flutter prismatically in that breeze
which ushers chaos through the carnival midway,
the memories of what was,
and what was only imagined.
Stooping to lift each word
to the light of the static moon,
fumbling it into my pocket
if it once belonged to you.
Words that probe
the ligatures of pain
strung across the canyon abyss
of what I once, with a laugh,
called love, now torn
like a worn page
of humanity's opus clenched
into a crumpled ball, worm-holed
by the quantum flux
of my cerebral denial,
arching its pain over
the ring of amygdala's curse,
the heart is broken,
consumed by the magma
of its own desire.

Seamus O' Brian

Any Particular Day

The mist hangs in the trees on mornings like these

Whilst emperors reign and thieves are hanged

And envious eyes watch empty thrones while cemeteries gnaw on duchesses' bones

While children feast on ache of hunger, 'Not pancakes again! ' the executive thunders.

And the earth turns again, and what will be now has evermore been

The rising sun dimmed by the tree-clinging mist on any given day- or none like this.

Seamus O' Brian

Approaching

leaves tremble slightly
silence forewarns the power
hurricane's approach

white is the fury
when chariots of the sea
drive forth from the deep

his hammer the wind
the surging black waves his mount
thunder's doom his shout

unquenchable force
wind and sea unite in power
earth and man bow down

devastation resides
in tidal surging memory
chaos evacuates

Seamus O' Brian

Atrium (Re-Submission)

I've left the light on
over the porch
which once opened
into my (house) .

There's rust on the hinges
and maybe that's why
the door creaks like
a broken mandolin

You have to give it
a bit of a shove
just for it to creak
open just a crack.

There once was a chair
There by the window
But it's gone now.
Like the memory
of the light.

Seamus O' Brian

Before The Fall (Haiku No.5)

greenest leaf now gold
clinging for one day longer
my heart still attached

Seamus O' Brian

Before You Leave

oh, for the gift of hands
to lift up the scattered pages of pain
and with the patience of the stars
transform them into the origami of peace
oh, for a soul with remnant enough
of the breath of divine to allow
the shadows of anger and pain
and evil to fall upon it and be absorbed
like the shadows of night before the dawn
oh, for eyes to see beyond the barbs
and spears of offense and wrath
to the thorn of wounded grief;
for words that might yet lay a balm
upon the aching chasm of a lonely heart;
I lay before you forgiveness and love
and fellowship and camaraderie,
the tarot cards of life and light,
lay down your spears and arrows
and choose one, or all,
or choose the shadows
and the pain.

Seamus O' Brian

Bereft: An Assumption (Etheree)

i
wander
in the mist
of the gardens
caught between time and
eternity. Asking
Which path caught your eye, stole your
Heart, when you wandered from my side;
left me wondering if I ever
knew where the horizon of your heart lay.

Seamus O' Brian

Between

a silent impulse fires
buried in folds of living
soil, traces its path
of energy like
telephones wires humming
in a winter breeze;
fishing line taut with
frantic fear pierced;
a path of living fire
flowing through muscle
untensed, muscle waiting
for its moment
to heed the impulse
when the anvil is struck-
just so, in this very spot.

A million crowded
steeds, bunched at the gate
necks arched with strain,
sweat glistening sunlight
reflecting from furrows
and chords of muscles
tightened and waiting
for the bell.
There! Hammer strikes anvil,
Impulse finds destiny
and a million stallions
released to surge their
corpuscular strength through
walls of living muscle,
driving, vortex thrusting
a quarter cup of liquid life
to hungry orifices waiting.

Tide slackens, levees
collapse, tent walls
billow in a lazy breeze.
Silent trickling inflow,
gentle tide rising, the impulse

vacant, but gathering itself
once more.

The rhythm of the sea,
the pause between strokes of the
waves upon the shore, so much
life- scrabbling of crabs,
settling of tiny clams,
rushing feet of mouse-like birds,
shore-scurrying, wave watching-
so much life happens
between the waves of the sea.

Mortgage signing, splintered toe
kissing, hands finding each other
in the dark across the cool,
vacant spaces of a comforter,
watching a child- too soon- stuff
the essentials of life into forty inches
of suitcase-
ahhh.....so much life happens
between the beats of a heart.

Seamus O' Brian

Borders (Re-Submitted)

Terrifying dimensions of infinity
Accuses this rectangle-
This black hole of possibility-
Tumultuous chaos of what might be

Belied by

Edges, so crisp, so tidy, so neat
Demarcate, not only, but also

Define

Four borders of reality

Beyond.

Empty! Shouts with accusation
Possibilities, infinite, tumbling
Paralyzing shards of permutation
This kaleidoscope cascading

Yet

Your barren rows
Unseeded fields
Unmarried harlots

Cry out for attention
In the hope of existence
Denied by the blankness
Of this eight and one half

- just so, no more-

By eleven by
whose decree
persists a mystery.

Brooding

A brooding thunderstorm darkens
Ominously my intended horizon,
Smothering the presumption of a
Setting sun with long, dark arms of
Cloud that humidly encircle my world.

Yet golden strands of luminosity edge
The darker masses beneath, speaking
A silent promise of light beyond the dark
To sea oats swaying with some concern
In the breeze of the oncoming storm.

Darting sand finches chase—then flee—
The waves, oblivious to the dark,
Encircling arms, but oh, so mindful of
The menacing wavelets. Legs ablur
With sand finch speed, yet in their
Utmost haste, pausing for the briefest
Moment, spying something in the
Receding waves—something only a
Sand finch might spy and find appealing—
To spear it, and hasten on.

A pelican interrupts his imitation
Of graceful flight by tipping over
His awkward mass and crashes
Headlong into the waves below;

As the final fishing boat picks its way
Home, treading carefully on the
Burgeoning waves, grumpily aroused
From their slackening pace by the
Approaching storm.

I stretch my legs and turn to face
The coming night.

Seamus O' Brian

Burdens

The leaves sway quietly today
As if to anticipate the weight
Of the burden whose ragged tethers
Tear furrows across the surface
Of my mind. The burden of
The carnage of living hauled
Behind me like some massive sack
Banging rudely about, knocking awry
The particularly arranged knick-knacks
Of everyone else's well-ordered lives.
But, no, I must go barging through life
Splintering the hedgerows, Caroming
Through the barricades, showering
Fragments of shattered dreams about
Spraying clods of once-good intentions
Into the shocked faces of well-wishing neighbors
And suspiciously nosy,
yet unconvincingly concerned
family and friends.
And still my burden, like some black hole
Of misery, sucks up all the debris and detritus
Of this spasmodic adventure
I once called life—
It's not the weight of the world,
It's the weight of my world
And I'll lean it against this tree
For a spell and watch the branches
Wave, and listen to the whisper
As the leaves softly pray.
And I'll just rest here,
perhaps a bit longer.

Seamus O' Brian

By The Road

Crouched by the gutter guiding with his fingers
Boats made of leaves and grass down streams
Of rainwater, rushing gently past to worlds unknown.
Hoping to be noticed, hungry to be remembered
But the car rushes past, leaving to worlds unknown.

An earthworm wriggles along, struggling for life
In a stream of water he cannot understand.
Fingers from the sky pluck him from the stream
And place, delicately, his wriggling form upon the edge
Of the grass he has known as home.

A boy, forming mud and leaves and grass into the shape
Of some kind of life, wriggles along in a stream of living
He cannot understand. When the screaming has passed,
And the silent tears rolling by have dried and the family
He has known has diverged like the rainwater
into the gutter and the sewer and the sea.

He wriggles along, searching for the shore, grasping
For the family he once called home. Unlike worms, though
Children have hidden within their small hearts little streams
Of strength, rivulets of hope, placed there by fingers in the sky.
So gathering up the splinters of his heart and the shards of his life

The little boy runs.

He runs in the warmth of the sun by the cobalt sea.
He runs through the fields and he runs through the meadows,
Misted by morning and burnished by sunset, chasing
Knights and giants and his little white dog.
He runs through his days and he runs through his years
Hoping to find the worlds unknown, where the edge of the
Grass will welcome him home.

And all through the days and all through the years, the sun still shines
Sometimes through clouds and sometimes fiercely upon his back
While fingers from the sky form the mud and the leaves of his living
And guide him slowly and gently back

to a place that love calls home.

So I will tickle you, my children, and wrestle with you, as the sun
Falls brightly upon our bed these Saturday mornings filled with laughter.
Then I will send you out to the roads and the fields and the meadows
To find the little boys crouching by the road, to find the children holding
The shards of their hopes and the shattered dreams of their little lives
And I will ask you to be for them fingers from the sky.

Seamus O' Brian

Changing Of The Guard

Like a slate of rain clad onyx broods the sea,
The fallen jewels of heaven tossed upon her.
As Apollo rides his unfurled banner of night,
And glowing, hesitates before the murky gate
Between the darkness of the star-swept sky
And the sunless darkness of the deep.

And I—I stand at the edge of sea and sky
Of land and sea
Of day and night.

Unknown to the billions upon their beds
Who contemplate the coming day;
Unknown to the billions upon their beds
Who contemplate the coming night.

A solitary gull ascends in agonizing grace
As if to contemplate Apollo's murky fate
Or witness perhaps my hour upon the stage.
Then pause the zephyrs of the fading night,
Daring to feather the slate of the brooding sea

They come to tug my sleeve and caress my neck
With salt-tinged scents of the coming dawn.

Seamus O' Brian

Charlatans

The scything blade of a blood moon eclipse
Reaps a bale of twine-ligated days
Nights tumble away, face cards tossed
From the magician's prosthetic hand
But the empty scale cannot unweigh
The child of a woman unborn no matter
How many witches curdle their broth
With a prophecy birthed by a bard.
Is it so difficult for a glass eye in the hand
To see what the tongue cannot speak?
Why parade then your clowns like
Trumpeter swans pillowed high
On the barge of the River Styx?
One-eyed jesters still prophecy
that cataclysms will devour
all of yesterday's good intentions
while they hide their gold in
gunny sacks laid on the skeletal backs
of emaciated cows. Seven, in fact.
If you smell sawdust, it might be a revival
Or it could be the circus, only the
Elephants can tell. But I'll trade you
Your ticket for a magical bean,
When placed in the socket
Of a giant's left eye, it will grow
You a vine, a magical vine,
And take you away
to a bloody red moon.

Seamus O' Brian

Chasing Leaves

There's a hole in my heart the shape of a tumbling leaf,
and I chase it across the days of my life;
I chase it over the crumbling years and across
The lands my feet have wandered
Through memories faint
and memories dear
Through weeks of pain
whose hope of end
drags on and on
Through days of bliss like gilded sun-drenched dreams
that drift away like vaped dew
when the breath of morning blows upon them
and i am gone again.
Empty rooms whisper
childhood dreams
And echo the sound
of side wrenching laughter-
'Hey, cut it out! '
Has faded to memory,
cut out long ago and drifting away
on slanting sunbeams
that climb the wall searching
for the end of summer.
And a woman i married
long ago hums a chorus
long forgotten
and pecks through the flotsam
of the days behind us
in search of my glasses
and something
unremembered
And I am gone again,
chasing a leaf
the shape of my heart

Seamus O' Brian

Column B

A building is being
dismantled across the street
from where I sit
reducing a laceration—
sustained when the
errant wobbling end
of a walker walked
into the serpiginous
crack of a sidewalk
catapulting the owner
of the yet to be lacerated
leg into a yet to be no longer
innocently bystanding
shrubbery—
I, reducing, as I mentioned,
said laceration into
a series of checked
boxes and items
from column A
but none, unfortunately,
from column B.

Impressed that I can
actually audibly discern
the straining shudder
of the earth mover's jaw
as it struggles
with some momentous article
of debris from what was a
previously non-descript
manufacturing facility
where perhaps Latinas
on their lunch break
gossiped with arched eyebrows
and knowing looks while picking
at the Saran wrap protecting
their Media Noche sandwiches
from the fine particulate residue
of their forty hour lives, but now

the shuddering steel jaws of tomorrow
gnaw away at the bones of
what was once a grand design,
and I have discovered that,
oh yes, I can check heart failure
in column B.

No longer driving. Check.

Recommend Assisted Living. Check.

Mr. Gingrich is also a widower,
and- with his recently acquired
unstable gait- may I humbly suggest
deserves an upgrade
from a 99213 status to a 99214,
which is definitely a plus for me,
but does his lacerated leg no
additional good, neither his
failing heart.

Across the street another chunk
of someone's dream
clangs into the dumpster.

Seamus O' Brian

Combustion

You gallop through life
Flailing your wayward fibers
Trailing a dazzling wake
Of hope and love and shoes
I sit on my log and watch
Chin in my hand, furrowing brow
The blazing combustion of you
And I love
every flicker,
every flame,
every shoe.

Seamus O' Brian

Conditional

If you knew who I was now
When I knew who you were then
Would you forgive me before
We ever became them?
If you gathered in the harvest—
Stacked and counted the bales
of our soul-searing pain,
Numbered the bushels
Of our flesh-scalding tears,
Compacted the silos
of loneliness, doubts, fears-
If you could have counted the cost,
Would you have sown the first seed?
If you factored in lies, betrayal, mistrust,
Could you ever have loved me
Before they became us?

Seamus O' Brian

Consumption

to grate our souls through the plining of impestuous days,
reclining yesterdays once the velvet cordoned entry way
to a dark and dusty death, "Lay on, MacDuff, and damned
be him who first cries, 'Hold, enough! '" but I've had enough
of this upended carousel run by uncivil gerbils `round the wheel
through the night and forever in my mind, urging me to buy
to buy, to buy, to chase after the Joneses, and run them down
with a Jaguar whose lease could feed a village if not for the
fan-tousled, aqua-black cocktail witch wagging her finger seductively
protesting the abandonment of this steel and leather opportunity
to distract from the curse of my expanding bald spot which seems
a more crucial imperative than the expanding ozone hole.
Instagram witches monetizing their fifteen minutes of fame,
duck-lipped exhalations blow out, out, brief candles in vain,
their ignorance of tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow
the surface reflection of a witches' brew devoid of hubris or shame.
A scarlet letter upon her palms, for Ambition was her middle name,
the wife of Macbeth would have ten thousand followers today
but all the toys in Harrods still would not take that damn spot away.

Seamus O' Brian

Couch Conundrum (Senryu)

If the past tense of
Sit is sat, then why is fat
The future of fit?

Seamus O' Brian

Daydream

Sunlight infusing green arbored stands

Pierced by the blue-fractured facets of sky.

Platinum gray, hang the Spanish moss strands

In a summering breeze that whispers and sighs.

Alone at my desk, impounded by stress

Through the window I gaze at bright August days

And long for the touch of summer's caress,

Fluttering the leaves, as the ivied-limbs sway.

From the window I turn to the work yet undone

The weight of my labors quenching the light

Of the shimmering gold of the late summer sun

Still, the siren song whispers of arboured delights,

And etches its verse where the mind cannot fight.

Seamus O' Brian

Demolition

They're demolishing that old Queen Ann,
the one with the porch that wraps around
from one forgotten conversation to the other,
where the rocking chairs tilted in the breeze;
shifted slightly toward the river three houses down,
to catch the site of clapping white sails and gulls
careening around the homebound shrimpers.

A white-columned porch, once a refuge
from the strangled clutch of summer's heat
where cooling twilight breezes would cup
the laughter and murmured voices of a day's
work well done; neighbors sharing a falling star's
wish and the optimism of autumn's horizon.

If I were there I'd cringe at each tearing sound
of pinewood floor splintering memories,
for my own hand learned its first touch
of finely sanding heartpine on those ancient beams;
my cheek still remembers the coolness, rested
against the varnish reflecting the breath-held
wonder of a child's first tottering steps.

The silence of a couple surveying a fireplace refinished,
a head nestled in the crook of a neck
like life comfortable in the embrace
of its own future. The silence of a dog
who no longer barks, the laughter of a child
no longer chasing balloons down stone-paved
sidewalks straight to the river, three houses down
from the place she once called home.

The white-columned porch is dumpstered now,
but there's no one there to witness the drama
because the story now is not their own,
and two hundred years have haunted her,
specters of laughter and sorrow, anguish and joy,
ghosts wandering so many hearts now silent,
beneath the oaks and stones

across the river's silent coursing waves.

They're demolishing that old Queen Ann,
but its foundation is laid forever
in the memory of my days on Lancaster Street,
three houses down from the river, where
the gulls careened and the white sails clapped
and so much of my life first found its footing.

Seamus O' Brian

Did I Dream? (Senryu O' Brian.22)

soft mist on dawn's lake
did I dream a mirage or
memories of you?

Seamus O' Brian

Discovery (A Haiku)

sunlight splashed tawny
elegance flows gingerly
morning light finds fawn

Seamus O' Brian

Driving The Platinum Coast

We have such wonderful
drivers down here in Naples,
seems Cleveland and Kalamazoo
send us only their best.
Drivers so adept in their skill
they can use the left turn signal
to indicate their intention
to proceed to the right.
Executioners of motorized dexterity
so refined they need not
know in advance
the direction of their desired
terminus, only a general impression
will suffice, for drivers of that notable
dexterity can, in the midst of the peril
of the most bustling thoroughway
come to a complete and sudden stop
to calibrate their bearings and determine
whether that bagel shop to the right
is indeed where Edna awaits.
Confirmation revealed by the application
Of the left hand signal.
I know of a couple, blue-haired and bald,
veterans of the art so practiced and seasoned
though his eyesight is gone; hers is not bad,
she's deaf as post; he's better than most,
and together they make
one hell of a driver.

Seamus O' Brian

Drowned

I am a man drowned in a river,
every ripple a reflection,
a delicate facet of you, weightless,
gossamer beauty, yet the composite whole
irrepressible, as your love passes over me,
sweeps around me,
compresses my body to the stony bed
of a river I never intended to cross.
Playful iridescence reminds me
of the magic
of my life made beautiful
by the current of your love,
each laughing splash a memory,
a sun-sparkled fragment of joy;
life that would be darkness
without the light of your love.
Yet the dark hollows and caves, places
our memory would rather not go;
jagged valleys we have fought to cross
now flowing with the depth of your love.
I am a billboard, the history of me
each pixel a beat of your heart.
I am a broadcast, radiolucent
biography, the memory of me
each pulse, each luminous strand
belongs to the strength of your love.
I am a man drowned in a river,
Buried beneath your waves of love.

Seamus O' Brian

Echo Of Silence

This tortuous canyon coiling its jagged edges
razors through the sinewed sediments,
deluvinations of painful fomentations
plowing through acres of rock and soil
and the sinking ache of a heart stranded,
a single boulder brooding over the center
of a stream passing by without a glance.
Ripples of water dancing past, splashing—
or laughing?

When the moan of the wind wanders
through this canyon and presses on,
this vacuum of silence, these remnants
of the memory of your voice, your laughter
drift like the windborne seeds of our
dandelion summers across the sky-pierced
loneliness of what we could never be.

They say time heals all wounds, but
does it not also canyon the fragile
clay of human hearts?
Your answer can never be the echo
of a yes that never was...

Seamus O' Brian

Evacuation

Sunlight evacuated from the chaos below
The irresistible tide of heaven pulls
Final beams of wandering light
Sucked from the crevices, the tidal pools
The reed-choked creeks of humanity
A silent monk waits
With the stillness of a calm sea
As evening recalls the steeds of light
To return home from the village
In the valley below. The last of the herd,
Pushed upward by the shadows arising
From silent doorways and still hollows,
Slowly clammers the crevices
of the canyon wall,
to stand for a moment
On the shoulder of the mountain
Flashing their manes of luminosity
Before disappearing into the wink
Of the setting sun.
On the shoulder of the mountain,
The silent observer waits,
As still as the emptiness of the space
That lies between the heavens
and the chaos that reigns
In the kingdom ruled by the sun.
He waits for the heaviness of the night
Knowing with indiscernible satisfaction
That even now it creeps along the pathways
Wanders up the shadowed alleys
Asphyxiates the final struggles
Of the tumult of day.
The shoulder of the mountain turns
Beneath the wheel of the heavens
And finally, the stillness of the night
Reigns, and in the weight of the darkness,
In the alone-ness of the mountain,
at last he can hear
The echoes of his soul.

Eyes To See

The hand cannot write
What the eyes do not see.
I must pupil my eyes to see
Beneath the flawless skin
of the apple
To the tautness of the crisp, white
Flesh, to the soft, brown decay
Where rot foment its ceaseless
Expansion, and death lurks in darkness,
To the slick, wet coils of the eyeless worm
Who knows naught but the devouring
Of his own existence, to the seeds
Lying in silent sleep at the center whose
Presence is the purpose of the whole,
And having never known light, yet carry
Within them designs which await their time
To transform sunlight into orchards of apples.
And if I wish to see, if I wish to know,
If I wish to understand the whole of an apple,
I must teach my eyes to see
More than the color of its skin.

Seamus O' Brian

Footfalls

The marble absorbs but does not accept
the sound of my walking, my walk-away steps
but the darkness of midnight never rejects
the souls who wander away from the light
the souls who wonder how deep in the night
is the bed of the grave in the pit of Sheol
these pieces of silver exchanged for my soul
if grace is a dragon-hoard Providence stored
to redeem my thirty and yours and yours
then footfalls must pause in these marbled halls
to my knees must I fall 'tween these mausoleum walls
for broken souls searching for the light they have lost
find victory in death at the foot of this cross.

Seamus O' Brian

For Alex In Winter

Winter comes like an early blanket of uninvited darkness,
smothering the sunset end of my November days;
creeping like the white bones of a frozen graveyard
over the fields and highways, through cities and towns..
Like a Siberian zephyr moaning snow and frost
in heaps and piles where once we remembered roads.
And suddenly the great maw of winter chews me
small again, not a player but merely a spectator.
I remove my pilot's cap to shamefully find
it is but cardboard and crayon as winter escorts me
once again to the passenger section of this flight,
my 48th pass through this section of the solar system
known to us northern hemispherers as winter,
known to the universe as nothing,
known to God as life.
As death before resurrection, darkness before dawn,
so the restocking of the mountains must precede
the silver ribbons of spring.

Seamus O' Brian

Fragile

I sent my heart to you
With the click of a key
Depressed in its slot
As if it were any other point
Of data for transmission
But this was my heart
Those sweat-glistening fears
That lurch me awake in the
Moon-shadowed nights;
The giddiest hopes that defy
Any sober confession;
The chest-scalding pain of
Of a thousand humiliations
And betrayals grouted into
The seams of the struggle of living;
The dream-flight euphoria of love
Falling hesitantly, yet precisely delicate
from my lips like a vow of chastity
whispered to heaven;
All of the deepest currents, all of the tides
All of the waves, every drop of this ocean
That is the existence of me
I have wrapped up into
The ventricles and valves
of the heart of my soul,
woven into the warp and the woof
of the Purkinje fibers,
the neuromuscular synapses
of what makes me,
me.

And with the press of a key
I have sent you my heart
And between each blink of this cursor
A resurrection occurs.

Seamus O' Brian

From Here, I See Two Men

Sleep, my son, and dream of when

We will trace the alpine glens,
And walk upon the wildest ways
Where bears have trod, but seldom men.

Sleep, and dream of future days
When we will stand face to face
Across that rushing mountain stream
And share a smile amidst the spray.

We'll pick our way through talus seams
Hear glaciers crack and eagle screams.
Beneath the harvest moon we'll spend
Our nights and share coyote dreams.

We will walk together then
In the silent ways of men
Side by side upon the trail
Over peaks and murky fens.

The time will come when we will stand
Toe to toe, as man to man
And I shall pause as you pass by
To watch with silent, father's pride.

So sleep in slumber's rest my son,
And lay your head my chest upon.
Then I will listen to you breathe,
And I will dream of days to come.

Seamus O' Brian

Haiku No.18

line divides sea sky
golden edge of day and night
horizon catching fire

Seamus O' Brian

Haiku No.19

seashore's dark tunnel
refuge makes this hole a home
eyes of crab watching

Seamus O' Brian

Haiku No.20

this leaf is trembling
the last golden sentinel
against winter's chill

Seamus O' Brian

Haiku No.21

stars fall to the field
first white dusting of cold light
winter's frosty breath

Seamus O' Brian

Haiku No.4 (As Tides, Seasons)

alone, waves tumble
sand undisturbed, no laughter
summer finds me gone

Seamus O' Brian

Haiku O' Brian 17

fog mountains hover
the sea an empty desert
dripping sails emerge

Seamus O' Brian

Haiku O'brian 22

cursing the blessing
huddled men scowl at the sky,
tears of the clouds, fall

Seamus O' Brian

Here Among Friends

somewhere in the whisper of the words
i find my refuge.

i smash the brake pedal surging
with the anger of a thousand wounds
or the pain of a single insult;
i thrust my car across the shoulder
and into the arms
of the trees beyond.

With the slam of the world behind me i stride
into the soothing shade of a million words
waiting to hold me, to hear me, to whisper to me
that i am among friends.

that here i belong.

Elegant, graceful beauty. Unfettered, primal power,
mysterious and seductive, enchanting and healing,

words

they know me and i know them
and it is enough.

Seamus O' Brian

Hope

If hope were a knotted stick of wood
its gnarled length the difference between
my reach and my grasp, I'd lean upon it
with all my heart's unmeasured dreams.

If my life is the dust unsettled from
the crooks and jags of this stony path
unlikely infused with the breath of God
each heartbeat a footprint to oblivion's grasp,

If this pilgrim must wander the space between
the dream of heaven and the teeth of hell
to pace the lonely interval, the height of joy
the depth of pain; where angels sing and devils dwell,

Heaven and hell within, without
the demon inside worth two in the hand,
then give me a staff well-worn in its use
to a well-tended grave in an un-promised land.

Seamus O' Brian

Horizons

Your eyes and your heart
Lost to the horizon of
Another man's love.
Somewhere on another
Cragged coast, the tide
Straining to hold on
To the algae-slicked rocks
Falls back, imperceptibly,
Regretfully, wave after wave
Until the jagged crevices
Of the rocks are wantonly
Exposed to the avaricious
Eyes of the greedy gulls.
Exposed to the light.

And if on that distant tectonic
conjugation of sea and earth
There is a slackening,
Ought not here on this
Very coast, ought not
The fluid arms of the ocean
Return to embrace this
Shore with deepening rivulets
Of life? Where, oh now, is
This refilling of empty harbors,
The long anticipated buoyancy
Of rusting vessels, languishing
At anchor? Why still do I sink
In cloying sediments
Of interrupted dreams?

What devious compass led us
To this Delphian coast where
The tide recedes yet never returns?
What transit can measure
The line of sight from your eyes
to those crevices of jagged coast
where your hidden heart lies?
What sextant could steer me

To the latitudes lost
Between the north star
And the ragged edges
Of our disrupted dreams?

There, in that slackening wave
Have I cast that compassed aberration!
I will take your hollow eyes and
Sing into your soul the beacons
That have marked the channels
Of our lifetime together. I will
Whisper into your ears the steps
Of every lighthouse we have climbed
Clinging arm in arm, laughter and tears
Where so many rocky shoals
Have waited hungry for us.
I will tear open my heart
and pour into yours an ocean
that will devour the tides
and bury all the cragged shores.

And we will find our own horizon
Once more.

Seamus O' Brian

How Loud Your Absence (Senryu O'brian 18)

how loud your absence
it fills the spaces between
all my tomorrows

Seamus O' Brian

How Strange

How strange this life
the currents that one day
lap against the rocky shoals
of a life we have known,
but times and seasons drift
so, too, the currents of our living
shift, and we find ourselves far
from the shores we have known
in some strange time or place
that now we must call home
until once more the moon speaks
to the heart of the sea
and our drifting begins again.

Seamus O' Brian

How Strangely Quiet

how strangely quiet this space
between words
when poems are inhaled,
absorbed;
the breath dies within
unreleased
when the doorway to thought
and vision
the tunnel of a soul's utterance
is chained
and barred
when petty grievances
stab the heart
of poetry.
The voice of art
lost
to the following
of the wind
The softly whispered
edge of human beauty
consumed
by pride and envy.
Farewell to those
who must find
solace
in shadow
I will remain
in the light
in the spaces
between these
words
Come
and find me

Seamus O' Brian

How To See

To fully appreciate a tree
Or a sparrow or the edge
Of a cloud against the sky
Look upon it
As if tomorrow
You will be blind.
Run your eyes over the textures
Let your mind taste the flavor
Of each hue and shade
Trail your hands over its bark
Let the roughness of a leaf
Wander between the tips
Of your fingers as if
today is the last day
you will walk free
beyond the prison walls.
True wealth is not
Possessions obtained
But momens possessed.

Seamus O' Brian

I Am Not Yet Done

Those swaying trees who bear
the turning of the seasons wordlessly,
unlike me, for I have passed into
this season where my heart has aged
much slower than my reflection;
my soul yet smoldering with some
remnant flame of youth,
much more so than the
contraption wielding it.

Reality coerces me to gather
my bags and move along now.
In this tale of romance and adventure,
swash-buckling and daring-do,
we have no role suitable for you
Please, now, sir, here you forgot
this bag, and- oh, there- something
seems to have fallen out, some
expired dream, some dormant
aspiration that will be useless
to you now, for sure, but here,
take it with you
and kindly move along.

Next door there is casting
for bridge players and golf cart
chauffeurs and gentlemen
in tweed jackets who sip their
coffee with pursed lips as the
riotous colors of life dance by
and the incense of romance
burning inside puffs a final plume
but you will never notice
because you are squinting
at the check, calculating the
tip with the precision
of an undertaker.

'NO, DAMMIT ALL! !

I WILL NOT BUDGE!
And I'll spill my dreams
all over this stage, right where
I stand! ' defies my soul.

But no one hears
the cry of a soul, for they're
far too occupied moving along
the well-defined lines
on the floor, in accord
with the script, previously approved
and not to be altered,
and certainly not improvised.

So I stand here, one hand
on my bag, one hand
on the door, and my fingers
brush lightly over the edges
of this one dream that
I will not surrender.

And the tree branches
silently wave
at the coming of winter,
but I am not yet done.

Seamus O' Brian

I Cried My Sister's Tears (Re-Submission)

You were the smallest
of us.

You were the butterfly born
into the garden of broken wings, you
were the diminutive flutter
we hovered over,
so anxious in our watch
for tatters or tears, but you
were born into the branch-wrenching,
soul-tearing gale of the garden.
And so we watched as you were torn,
uselessly, helplessly trapped in the
chains of our own broken childhood,
fumbling about with oven-mittened hands
while the ragged pain of your cries
echoed within the silence of
our hollow amusements,
but our clownish antics
could not distract from a heart
torn from its love.

It was your heart
and your tears that
our hearts, when they were
yet small, casualties of the
vulnerable years, grieved for.
A twin you were—and are—yes,
but you....
you were the smallest of us.

We have walked far
from the memory of those days,
forded streams that became
rivers of years,
ascended heights from which
we could see all the world—
or nothing but our souls;
we have left footprints across

lifetimes of friendships,
and yet,
we will always be bound
by this love
broken in a garden,
but never destroyed.

And you...

you will always be

Loved

by all of us.

For Janie, whose sister's love for us has never dimmed

Seamus O' Brian

I Will Become The Morning

I will disappear into the memory of the wind;
I will fold myself into the gilded leaves of dawn;
reach for my bones and you will grasp a handful
of morning; seize my flesh and you will find
in the unfolding of your fingers an empty chrysalis-
a vacant cocoon whose tattered threads
disintegrate into the elusive fragrance
of fresh cut grass or perhaps the warm,
chunky smile of a November moon.

Scream my name into the tawny slate
of some un-named canyon, and I will ride the
echo of the granite walls deep into the memory
of the earth; her molten amniotic contractions
shuddering with the promise of mountains
and jungled arroyos and sky-towering redwoods,
all over which the newborn stars blushed
to cast their silvery rain
upon the first dawn of a mountain dynasty.

But don't look to exhume my name from the grave of the dead;
don't waste an indulgent tear on my behalf
to spring the memory of my life from the purgatory—
the tedious liturgy of the ungrateful half-dead-
for I have fused my DNA into the beauty of the living;
in realms of awe I have melded my vision into the
gloriously tangled tapestries of creation. When my soul
finally rejects this transient allograft
I will scatter like a sunbeam fractured into a thousand
shards piercing the wonder of all that is alive,
all that is wonderful to behold.
And I will become the morning.

Seamus O' Brian

If I Am Forced Senryu O' Brian 21

if I am forced to ask
what a friend is then you
are not my answer

Seamus O' Brian

If You're Looking

For anyone who might be interested in looking me up after this life is done, I'd like to recommend a few of the more likely spots to find me.

First of all, I'm certain that somewhere in heaven there will be a spring-fed lake nestled in the kind of mountains (foothills, actually, but to us they were mountains) commonly encountered in north Georgia, and I'm pretty sure, too, that one of those lakes will have a floating swim-dock with a diving board frequently featured at summer camps across the Smokies. If it's a hot summer day, and the sun is blazing high overhead, you'll probably find me there with Mr. Hunt, one-time camp director, back flip coach, and rock skimmer extraordinaire. We'll be practicing our back flips and laughing at each other's belly flops, but feel free to come on over and skim a rock or two—we won't mind the interruption a bit.

I'm also pretty sure there will be a length of beach somewhere up there with a fishing pier stretched out over the waves. It will be a wooden pier, the kind that soaks up the summer sun and feels so good on pruny wet bare feet; the kind of pier that thrums when those bare feet pound across it trying to achieve the perfect cannonball velocity. There's a fair chance you'll find me there, running cannonballs off the end, or lying on my back, stretched out to soak up the warmth of the wood and to watch the cumulus clouds sailing by overhead.

Of course, somewhere there will be a lonely mountain that overlooks a ruggedly beautiful valley trimmed with the ribbon of a winding sapphire river, rimmed with sun-glistened snow peaks. Look for me there—somewhere near the top, sitting on a boulder—I'll probably be singing my favorite wilderness song (which happens to be my favorite hymn, How Great Thou Art) .

If you don't find me in any of those places, then I might be walking. Walking down some unwalked road. Walking down some unmapped trail; walking across worlds, across solar systems, across galaxies. If you see me, don't be afraid to say hello and chat for a while; I'd love to know where you've been—to hear what you've seen. Even I will need company every 10,000 years or so.

I won't need a mansion. I'll just need a place to sit and watch the sun set. A place to sit and rest, to know for once and all that my work is done.

This may not be theologically correct, and I am not trying to be irreverent in any sense, but I believe God understands. He made me this way.

Seamus O' Brian

In Case You Forgot To Remember

The noose around my neck
Slips sometimes, sliding
Down loosely, and I almost
Forget it's there, quite almostly
Breathing air that has no metallic taste
of blood or the memory of stiletto words,
but then inexplicably—my view, you see—
a great, hearty tug catches my breath
Right there where my Adam's apple
Might still catch the glance of
A serpent, but certainly not a woman,
But perhaps it is the name of a woman
Whispered in an ear that initiates
This particular noose-tug. But between gasps
I wonder, who is whispering
in whose ear?

Seamus O' Brian

In The City Of Peace

In puddles seeps the blood upon
The streets of old Jerusalem.
An ancient Hate once more aroused,
The narrow streets in hunger prowls.

In the City of Peace the stones cry out,
Who long have known the pang of war.
Hear their groans of protest now,
Who taste the bitter cup once more.

Parchment skinned old bag of bones—
Frail, bent man on wobbling gait
Comes lifeless down on cobbled stones
As children cheer their well-aimed hate.

Her life seeps out to stain the ground,
This father's child with lifeless eyes,
Who stares at Hebron's unseen clouds
While father's grief with anger vies.

Tender sapling, crudely downed,
And Hatred feeds—not once but twice—
Upon the child his bullet found,
And then the man who lives but dies.

Each time he hears her whimpered cries,
Recalls the slackening of her grip
Within him vengeance' furies rise
To drag him into Hatred's pit.

How will you tell your little ones
Their father took the wrong bus home?
Was blown apart by Tuesday's bomb,
Was torn from life like flesh from bone?

Oh, Jerusalem, your stones are seeped
In blood, but not yet quenched!
For He who wept again must weep
For hearts in darkness clenched.

Oh, City of Peace, your stones cry out!
Longing for the touch of One
Whose ancient blood was spilled upon
The streets of old Jerusalem.

Who chose the crown of agony
To wrest from God our enmity-
To split the holy mount by One
Who brings at last a lasting peace-
the promised peace of David's son.

Seamus O' Brian

International Women's Day

I celebrate International Women's Day, not because there is some inherent necessity to elevate the concept of womanhood, for women are a creation of the same Mind and Hands that cast all the wonders of the universe across the sea of nothingness, as perfect in their conception and teleologically complete in their existence as anything in the manifestation of all creation.

I celebrate International Women's Day in the same way that I celebrate all of the beautiful wonders and amazing marvels displayed in the panoply of this existence, surely distinct each in its own right, but by no means separate or divorced from the whole; by no means an entity that requires the effort of anyone to enhance the glory of its own essential qualities.

I celebrate the strength of womanhood, not as a distinction from humanity, but as another refraction of that same notable quality variably inherent to all of humanity, a manifestation of power and depth displayed across a spectrum of expression, equal, but wonderfully not identical.

I celebrate the women in my life like my mother, who painted a flesh and blood portrait of resilience, strength, perseverance, and creativity that was essential to the crucible of who I would be in this world, and what I could achieve.

I celebrate the beauty of my wife, not merely that overwhelmingly appealing physical attractiveness that took my breath away and imprisoned all other thoughts of a life without her, but the beauty of her grace toward me through all these years, the powerful beauty of her vision of the potential that was locked inside me and the patience to unleash it. The beauty of her compassion to those who are so often discarded by a world that values lesser qualities than the soul of a human being.

I celebrate the passion of my girls, who are not afraid of the future, and who burn with a raging (Alex) and stoically quiet (Caera) zeal to seize the future and make it a better place.

I celebrate the women in my life who taught me the love of the written word, the passion to pursue excellence in my art; who taught me to walk in the paths beyond this world into the presence of God, who taught me concepts of compassion and generosity and grace.

I celebrate International Women's Day because, unfortunately, there are so

many whose eyes have not been opened to the reality that womanhood is a concept complete in its perfection, consummate in its execution, and wholly unnecessary of improvement or confinement.

I celebrate the beauty and dignity and strength of the marvelous creation of women, unique in all the universe, and as worthy of wonder and admiration as any other marvelous feature of existence.

Seamus O' Brian

Interval, Senryu O' Brian 7

Life is what happens
Interrupting, distracting
Between the stanzas

Seamus O' Brian

Is This Pain?

down on my knees
bowed under the weight
of each accusing blow.
Is this pain, or am I praying?
Is there even a difference?

is there a syntax of physics
to which the soul must adhere?
such as the mass of haunting guilt
buried in the treeline of unfinished
days times the velocity of life
dragging me behind-
the thudding blow of
each day's cobblestoned
expectations equaling the
force of the failure I see
chalk-lining these dead dreams
guttered in this street?

What bizarre refraction is this
that each soul-wrenching shortfall
that bows me to my knees
reflects in the eyes of my child
something like the wavelength of hope?
What witchcraft is this
that the shame of my inadequacies
yet instead glimmers like faith
in those eyes that see only love?

Is this love, or is this pain?

Is there even a difference?

Seamus O' Brian

Just Words

just words
back turned arms crossed

i say
i love you
im sorry again
more words

but the other words
still drift in the air
floating blowdarts
still finding your heart

you say
can you please
remove your knife
the wounds still bleed
and i dont need
more words

i hope
maybe one day

Seamus O' Brian

Legacy

Tomb stones planted in granite rows
Speak without voice to future tenants
But for the passed, the tense is present.
The living speak for the dead
Speak to dust dancing
From death to death!
The dead buried for the living
For the sake of the dead
Or so the living won't forget
What the dead can't remember.
The sun slants between
Patterns of granite and green
Whispers of silence ascend
From rows of corpses unseen.

But my watch reads one ten,
So it's time, it would seem,
To return to unliving again.

Seamus O' Brian

Life And Mountains (Senryu)

from this summit I see
snow laden peaks conquered
pain exhaled for joy

Seamus O' Brian

Life, Modern Art, And Bad Poetry

I am a reader of bad poetry.

I can't help myself;
I am irresistibly drawn
to those tangled rootlets
of optimistically jangling lines,
those stanzas of unfortunate rhymes
cobbled in there like flour-
dusted bricks in a muffin pan;
to those clumsy metaphors
that stumble over their own
awkward prepositioning
like a convention
of disagreeably intoxicated
Scrabblers in Vegas.

What is my attraction, then,
to these unpolished gems,
to these sow-eared silk poems?

Perhaps it is there, tucked in between
"rose" and "nose"- a little
Sliver of your heart, peaking out.
And just there, I see it now—
A timid glimpse of your very soul
Gingerly, held out, hoping the metaphor
disguises the tremble of your hands
tendering the raw truth of your art.

Perhaps it may be that the tapestry
of my own life is yet
a smudged finger painting,
a painfully childish caricature
of masterworks I have known.

How can I cringe with literary
hypocrisy at the words of another
when my LIFE is so illiterate,
when the precious particles of

the hourglass I have been given
are their own scrambled tangle
of participles dangling,
infinitives and initiatives
interrupted,
awkwardly endless run-on fragments of unfulfilled
potential, and repetitive redundancies
(perhaps expecting a different outcome?)

If even one of my days
had the simplistic grace
of a straightforward rhyme
(Here, please, add 'sublime')
would I not want
to publish that status?

So as I continue to smudge
this wreckage of life across
all widely recognized lines,
I will persist in not cringing
but write glowing reviews
for floundering but ambitious
lyrical works
as I celebrate passionately
the art of bad poetry- -
and the skill of
calamitous living.

Seamus O' Brian

Like Mine

I saw my hands
the other day
on another man.
Gripping his elbows
unconsciously self-protecting.

Like my hands do.

Fingers like mine
slender, not fine
but freckled,
like mine.

Hands that tilled the earth,
milked the cows,
patted my head-

perhaps.

Hands that baited the hooks
gutted the fish, handled the crabs
with no fear of pinchers,

whatsoever.

Opened unopenable jars
unwrenchable nuts
unworkable whatsits.

Hands that held
my mother's face
before love became a memory.

Before my head was unpatted
my shoulders unsqueezed.
My life unguarded.

Before the days of
unconscious self-protection.

Seamus O' Brian

Lonely Today

I'm lonely today
Stirred into the swirl of the day
Motion all around me, kinetic,
Frenetic.
But there is a sluggish calm in the bayou
Of my soul.
All is still. If I breathe I will move
The world.
The cicadas sing, a buzzing that magnifies
The weight of the stillness; moss hangs without
A whisper of wind.
To be a listless bog in the turgid cataracts
Of chaos; a specter afloat, unconnected
To the revelry of living.
Can you hear my silence?
Can you see my translucence?

I am not the one sheep.
I am the second.
The one no one realized
Was gone.

Seamus O' Brian

Loops

The thread of this day has unwound
Un-spoiled loops lay at my feet,
And looking at the tangled lengths
I am left to contemplate that this
Is what I have purchased with
Hours from my life; these tangled
Loops have cost me a day of living.
No refunds.
No returns. No exchanges.
All sales final.
So I gather them up, frustrating and beautiful
In their imperfection, for they are mine,
And I carry them hopefully into
Tomorrow.

Seamus O' Brian

Love Grows

Once with a heart that
Skipped and burned
With every frantic thought of you.
Once with hands that betrayed me, turned
trembling, clammy, so oft with you.

Love was a concussion of fireworks,
The pounding of the ocean's surf
Within my heart with threat to burst-
Inside my chest when you were near
And fail with absence' curse.

But Love grows.

Like an acorn into frantic life
Bursts forth, an eager expulsion
Of newborn growth, Life's first light,
How rapid it grows, unfolding-
A genetically driven explosion.

Yet draws itself higher and
Stronger. Slowly and steady
It reaches for the open sky,
Patiently growing deeper into
The earth it grips, hidden. Slow.

So Love grows.

The sound of the wind
as it passes through the leaves
and sways the creaking boughs
of the unconcerned oak
Does not measure his strength.

The crashing arcs tumbling down
Upon the rocks and sand
Of ten thousand strands of
Beach and coast do not
Measure the strength of the sea.

Yet Love grows.

And the power of the sea is found
Not in the crashing of the shorebound waves,
But in the quiet, inexorable deeps,
Unmoveable, unchangeable depths.
Yes, the measure of the ocean's strength
Is found in those unchanging deeps.

And the fury of the hurricane's raging whip
That assails the acorn's mighty gift
And finds it standing where it stood;
In dignity, quiet, unperturbed once more.
To stand against the furied blast,
Ah, such is the measure of its quiet strength.

So Love Grows

For the measure of our love
Is no more the racing of young hearts,
But the force of the storms it has withstood,
And will withstand, though all hell rise against it,
For in love we vow again
With heart and soul to stand
Together in life and death as one.

Though rich or poor; through day and night
Through the fury of the storms and in
The quiet of the mornings after-
Through grief and joy; peace and sorrow
Pain and healing.

Our love has grown.

On this side of life I have known
The strength of love, born from above
Tempered by fire and tried by time.
Quiet though it be, not tumultuous;
Not in turbulence of emotion,
But deep, unmoveable, unchanging.

Measured not in words or gifts
But in patience, grace, forgiveness.

Even so our love has grown.

Love... 'bears all things, believes all things,
hopes all things, endures all things.
Love never fails.' 1 Corinthians 13: 5

Thank you, Joanne, for sharing your love and your life with me.

Seamus O' Brian

Lovers' Game

We play our game again,
You and I.
Could you love again?
With a smile.
If you die
I guess I must
Is my reply.
You laugh.

Later I reflect
Would I love again?
And deep inside
A melancholy chord replies,
What is love?
A word so often frivolous
Of friends and dogs
And ice cream cones.

And if the question is addressed
In terms like these, I guess
My answer would be yes.
And yet within the soul's retreat
A gentle voice repeats,
I did not ask if you would love,
But could you live again?

Upon me shines your smile
Like the sun upon my soul.
Our hearts are so entwined
That only with you am I whole.
Your joy and peace and happiness
The very breath within my chest.

Can I live from you apart?
Without a soul am I alive?
Is a man without a heart
Ever likely to survive?

Though I find someone, someday

And seem to others still alive,
When they write upon my grave
The day on which I died,
I'll know it was the final time
I looked into your eyes.

So laugh with me again,
And play our little game,
And hug me every day
And kiss me when I ask,
For only God can say
Which day will be our last.

Seamus O' Brian

Luminosity

The molten heart of a star has fractured.
An invisible ligature of gravity,
The corset of an aeon's passing
Galaxy, moving between the words
Of God, has ruptured its integrity
Spilling world-devouring flames
Of nameless cosmic radiations
That will appear as rainbowed light
Ten million years from now,
Spilled upon the vast velvet
stretched between the lakes of fire,
the eyes of God that shield us from
nothingness, and the emptiness
of everything.

Pre-dawn frost sifts the browning fields
Of November as the sun-creased farmer
Hitches his asynchronous knees
Up the incline toward the pale
Lemon orb emanating
From the side porch-light.
The finger crags of a time-worn hand
Reach up to clear the festoon
Of cobwebs beneath the light,
Then pause as a single filament
Of silvery silk descends,
Translucent arachnid
Feeding the silk from behind.
The descent pauses, tiny
Acrobat spins slowly in place.
The hand of the broken marionette
Falls, then rises to flip the switch.
The last chapter of night
Reclaims the fields,
A blackness unmoved
By a rupturing star
Ten million years away

Lunatic's Reflection

The last full moon of summer
is ruling the skies tonight.
The crunching of gravel under my feet,
humming cicadas high in the trees;
moon-cast shadows fall on the gravel
where the dreams of summer begin to unravel.

Seamus O' Brian

Meanwhile, Back At The Office

They bring their scowls to my office
Mouths weighed down at the corners
By the burdens of living affluently.
Trifling annoyances that delay
Their tee times or, worse, interfere
With the 3: 00 matinee.
The Rolls detailer home, sick with the flu.
The 16th green closed for the day
To accommodate CPR on the gardener
No one knows but jokingly calls Jose.
Trifling nuisances whose real detriment
Is to increase the furrowed wrinkles between
Their brows and the down-curving sinks
on the corners of their down-curving mouths.

Nothing a little Botox can't fix.
Whole Foods out of Pate?
Starbucks prolonged your latte?
Lear jet still on the fritz?
Shoot, nothing a little Botox can't fix.

You bring your hardened little,
Miserly hearts to my office
And grouse that I'm running
Twenty minutes behind schedule
To paste on your face the resemblance
Of a smile. Over in Haiti, meanwhile,
The legs of a little girl
On crutches are slowly rotting away
For lack of a treatment that costs
Less than the foam on your bloody frappe.

Nothing a little Botox can't fix.
Parts for your Maserati delayed?
The cream on your crepes is off just a shade?
The clasp on your Rolex—sometimes it sticks?
Shoot, nothing a little Botox can't fix.

You want me to take your tightly grim scowl

A little bit here; a little bit there
Voila! Now you have a pert little pout.
You ignorant snit, can't you figure it out?
Just smile a bit, while you're shopping about.

Nothing a little Botox can't fix.
If the plight of the world has got you down
If the rate of the Dow is making you frown
If they're all out of rooms, up at the Ritz,
Shoot, that's nothing a little Botox can't fix.

Not much a little Botox can't fix.

Seamus O' Brian

Memories

candid photographs from the past
lie unobtrusively in the drawer
of my desk. First drawer
on the right.

Like pieces of my life
A small stack, quiet
In the darkness

A younger me
smiling.
My daughter- now a young lady
Then a small tiger,
with black marker whiskers
and black marker nose,
held in my arms,
and smiling.

How a black marker
can transform
a three year old
into a tiger
is magic.

Like memories lying
quietly in a drawer.

Seamus O' Brian

Moonbeams- Haiku

Silver moonbeams find
What only night cannot hide
Star-gazing laughter

Seamus O' Brian

My Heart Knows What My Eyes Cannot See

God, my eyes arise to the place where I have seen you,
to wait for your appearance, with a heart that trusts
not from instruction, but from the days and years of a lifetime
that have been shaped by the hand of your deliverance.

You have been my tower of strength, the river
of abundance that has given life to my soul
and whose waters turn my days of toil into gardens of peace.

My heart will praise you for your salvation, before my eyes
behold it, for your deliverance is like the coming of dawn.
I will not count the hours nor the depth of the darkness,
for my heart is stayed upon the certainty of the light that I know
shines beyond all darkness. Oh, how my heart longs for the touch
of your hand upon my shoulder and the sound of your voice,
whispering, "Fear not, for, behold, I am with you always."

Though I cannot see you, I know that every tree, every mountain,
every moment of the day is the fingerprint of your hand
holding and sustaining all that I am and all that I cannot be.

Seamus O' Brian

My Psalm Of The Morning

Every dream I have ever dreamed is merely a memory of something unfound,
But You are the fulfillment of the reality of which dreams can only whisper
You are the joy of hope realized in a world where the hope of hope crumbles
You are the thirst of which all other thirst is a but a shadow
The water that satisfies that which thirst can only imagine
And the hunger for which all food is but the memory of a dream in the morning
I may blow away in the wind of time, returning to the dust from which I was
formed
I may disappear into the nothingness from which I came
But if there is any particle of existence, any remnant of thought or matter
The hope and love of the most insignificant remnant will find its gaze in You.

Seamus O' Brian

My Song

If I unveil the song of my soul,
a stagehand lunging upon the rope
of an opening night curtain,
transforming the encyclopedic
romance of pain and fear
and everyday boredoms
into the motion of the air-
waves that ebb and flow
invisibly across the tide
of the oceans of air-
my life poured out
like chalk-boundaried blood
on the night-slicked pavement
and no one hears,
what have I done?
If I select the jewels of my existence
the pain-forged gems of the
memories of living, burnished bright
in the dusty soil of my years
by a million trudging footsteps
pressing in to the whipping
winds and biting rains
of life's indifferent oppression,
If by grit of resolve I force these
huddled-over treasures into the
cattle cars of words and lines
and release them to rise
like light-born lanterns
one after the other
carrying my soul to the stars
above, bearing my hopes
my dearest aspirations
my most intimate glimpses
of beauty; the marrow of my meaning
and the sinews of my significance,
If I set them free, and no one reads them,
no one touches the lines
and feels the most fragile
shuddering earthquake of

empathy, If they lie dormantly unread
like the stones of a plundered tomb,
if they gather dust, slowly crinkling their
edges biding time until the great reckoning
of the dustbin,
then what have I done?
Every man is a poet, and every life an epic
and who has time anyway
for anyone else's tragedy?
I will sing my song to the stars
on cold winter nights and scribe my words
to the ages of time that watch dully over
the writhing masses of humanity
swaying back and forth in the breeze of eternity
like fields of grass holding forth their words
and their songs like soon-vanquished flowers
hoping to be noticed.
Hoping to be remembered.
Hoping to be heard above
the yawning silence
of eternity.

Seamus O' Brian

None So Blind

light emblazons my eyes
squinting tightly I repel the advance
eye embrace ignorance

Seamus O' Brian

Nostalgia

Nostalgia, the cold, searing pain
that creeps down, rib by rib
ribbons of liquid frost sliding
downward to blanket the
small cabin of warmth
whose light fills even
the darkness of a man's
chest, icicles extending
to enshroud the amber
of each glowing window,
smother the flickering crack
of firelight under the door
until the whole of the heart
is frost and darkness and pain.

Nostalgia,
the pain of the mind as
it returns to the memories
from which we have been
evicted,
the pain of the soul
as it returns to the home
the body has long abandoned.

Seamus O' Brian

Not Yet

I never did dance
With the Homecoming queen, yet
The waltz still plays, no?

Seamus O' Brian

Numbers Game

In nineteen fifteen
when Frost first wrote
there lived on earth
two billion souls;
now there are seven
(point three)
which makes me believe
I am four times the poet
I would have been then!
give or take a
half a billion men.

Seamus O' Brian

Ode To The Master Of Flight (Haiku)

dart and hover,
pirouette the morning breeze
summer dragonfly

curtsy to the wind
your wings hum your thankful psalm
your joy of flight our gift

dance through morning's gold
translucent silk fills your wings
sun-pierced dragonfly

living dragon kite
no tether but my eyes in wonder
we share this single joy

Seamus O' Brian

Of Death And Tidal Flats

Some mornings I'd wake up
and smell the tidal flats
of Barfield Bay pushing out
from the forked mangrove knees
like vast brown carpets unrolling
themselves over the briny basin.
The silvery pallor of a full moon
hovering over the far blue horizon
shimmering like a mirage in the
dawn of the morning sky, but
sucking out the waters of the bay
jus' the same as you'd suck out
the Cajun spice of a crawfish head
'fore tossing it in the stack
of ransacked shells piled up
in the middle of the table.

That's what death smells like.

That cloying sweet smell blowin'
off the tidal flats in the morning breeze,
the smell of living things supposed to be
buried in the warm green waters all laid
out on brown carpets for the eye of the
sun to squint over with its gaze of death.

Sea grasses and mollusks and crabs
with their bed covers ripped off rudely
exposing the frailty of their existence
like nude lovers confronted by the light
of morning, working their mandibles
and appendages, uselessly gesturing
at the unforgiving power of the sun,
dying and rotting and blowing the scent
of their death wherever the breeze will
carry it.

That's what death smells like.
That's what cancer smells like.

When it raises its grim silhouette
over the horizon of your mother
or your nephew or you.

When it begins to slacken the current
of living and it's manageable and
plannable and workable, but
it keeps inexorably drawing out the tide,
keeps sucking away the living,
keeps swallowing the warm layers
of living, the hopes, the dreams,
the tomorrows that protect us
from our dying. We lay here
in the frailty of our humanity,
mandibles and appendages flailing
uselessly as cancer comes to suck
the living out of us, the laughter
in the bathtub, the toe-snuggling
April Saturday mornings, the long-
walking autumn evenings, until
all our living is a pile of carcasses
and the one you love is no more
than the smell of death blowin'
off the tidal flats of Barfield Bay.

So say a prayer for us, if you think
about it, for those of us
who take up our knives every day
to stab that son of a bitch
in the heart every chance we get.

Seamus O' Brian

On The Edge Of An Unfinished Poem

Four days of rain like bleary freight cars rumbling by
Green boughs dance in the grey of a thunderstorm sky

Sometimes I stand at the edge of a poem
A sabre-edged precipice, a bridge to nowhere
A single-rimmed canyon staring at the haze
Of somewhere I wanted to be.
The ground where I stand, solid and certain
Like the two lines I've written,
The image that triggered the path to the edge
But I can't make the leap, can't take the dare
So I stand on the edge of the canyon and stare.

I see frogs hop in the searchlight of oncoming cars
Rain thrashing the streets in the wash of halogen eyes
Trees whipped by the rain-laden gusts of tropical ire
And beach-combers huddle and mutter in lobbies and bars

But I can't get there from here on this side of the gorge
Can't find the right meter, can't find the right rhyme
So I'll leave all the pieces right there on the forge
Of the wordmaster's anvil for an opportune time.

And the frogs
hop away
splashing,
ducks wag away
waddling,
and I go take a nap
while the green boughs dance,
and the words
wash away
like the guttering
storm.

photograph by Michael Roberts

On The Other Side Of My Religion

lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes,
pride of life, her clenching jaw
grimly set, each phrase incised
daring us sinners, although not raw,

yet green, us boys, under August days,
sunburnt skin chafing Sunday whites
us boys her gavel-striking gaze
aimed to breach lust's tempting bite;

though her scowl, corners ratcheted down
by the keel of her jaw in judgement poised
seemed abundantly sufficient in pride endowed
but to us deficient, perhaps, in lusts enjoyed.

Her soul, a carcass drained of all vitality
by the spidery fangs of religiosity
seemed less a warning against apostasy
than the joyless desiccation of the Pharisee.

I've searched within my hours and years
The miles I've walked and mountains climbed
Torringly flowered alpine glens spilt joyful tears
from eyes o'erwhelmed in glories sublime

and here I find, not chance, but One
who does not bear a master's chains nor whip
But as a Father says, "Please, Child, come
My love is not earned, it is my gift

even as all the beauty of earth is yours
And your love and gratitude will surely gain
what laws of men, vain rituals fail to secure
My heart, my love, my home, my Name.'

Seamus O' Brian

On The Wrong Side Of Bad Intentions

When I dipped my pen into this black ink
I found leaking from your heart,
It tinged my poetry with the flavor
Of that dreaded rim of night
Which crawls over those who shuffle about
Rummaging in the rubble of an earthquake,
Bitter as the smoky sound of crackling
That remains in the forest glade
Even after fiery winds have burnt past.
Like the Stygian curse that breathed
You into the chambers of my heart
Grinding the tectonics of my life to a halt.

What black coach trundles the hearse
That bears the rotten intentions of
Your grim plan into the meadows
Of our lives? This is no graveyard
Here, but still you insist now
Upon laying these corpses about,
The trust and compassion of your victims
Scattered around for the carrion fowls
And stoats to plunder. As you crawl about
In the branches above, knowing nothing
But to weave, and to weave and to weave
And I wonder as I lie here, knowing only
The hissing of thread upon thread,
Do you smile as you exhume the vitality
Of your prey, one soul at a time?

And here is good Jude, bearing flecks
Of concern in his eye, a naked blade
In his hand, wondering
"What do you here in this foul part of town?
Have ye no sword, there are villains about? "
"Just my pen, good sir, and near out of ink,
Yet before we depart, this one—"

Seamus O' Brian

Order Of The Bathtub

Once I stood in the bathtub.
I remember the scene precisely
For its solemnity and gravity
The grey sun that set on 6037
Flora Terrace when I whispered
To heaven my vow of celibacy
While George Washington looked on
From the ceramic tile patching the hole
Beneath the shower head while rivulets
Of warmth flowed down the flesh of my lonely soul.
If You loved me when no one else could
Or would, why should I not make you a gift
Of this unwanted heart? These skinny limbs
These crooked teeth, this worthless laughter
Of an impoverished child the only gifts
I had to give, all I had and all I was
tossed to the rubbish bin day by day
by the world's uncaring, unseeing eyes.

And so I wrapped them carefully
In the holy pain of a child's love
And gave them to the One
Who whispered "Just as you are."

And as the years crept by and finally
The edge of the glacier reached the sea
And tendrils of love invaded
the crevices of my heart and
Broke it open.

And I danced in the light of love
And my soul sang the songs
With words I had never learned,
Breathed into me from the edge
Of time, and in the seasons of love
This acorn became an oak.
And yet, the guilt of my vow
Before God and George Washington
Secretly gnawed at my soul.

How weak I am, unfaithful
And ungrateful?
To take back that precious gift
I gave before love ran through
The desert of my life like the water
That ran down my flesh on the day
That I vowed I would be yours alone.

Although many years have
Bent my back and dimmed my eyes
And cracked and worn
The bark of this old oak,
I have heard the whisper
Of a thousand voices in the wind
Or a single voice in a thousand winds
Gently chiding me that the gift I gave
In innocence, tender solemnity
Was given back a thousand-fold to me
Joyously, through the light of the love
Under which I danced, every breath
Of the song which filled my soul
Every ring of laughter from
The depths of my child's heart,
The very gift I gave given back to me
Wrapped in beauty, wrapped in tears,
Wrapped in the joy of all these years.

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Seamus O' Brian

Pair O' Docs

I shan't attempt a Limerick
'Twould likely fly like a mason's brick
But without any rhymes
And just three lines
A little haiku should do the trick

paperback drifts in
deserted island treasure
salty Limericks

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Seamus O' Brian

Paris Is Still There

Paris is still there clutching her river.
Scudding zeppelins of vapor drifting above;
Glaring blue shields of summer sky
Relentlessly press down as she covers her eyes
With her lamp-posted bridges.
Autumn days tumble past the streetside cafes
Whispering treasonous thoughts to
Waiters impatiently counting their drinks tonight
In tips still clutched by the pockets
of the afternoon sippers.
What blow is this in the steel of December
Sweeping trenchcoated figures
Down rain-glistened streets,
While the flags of the Palais are snapping
Like the wings of the pigeons fleeing the square
While the city of Paris clutches her river.

We huddled there, when love was
Less like a question unasked
Than a bridge in the water
Spanning the distance
Between two wary hearts.

Seamus O' Brian

Paved With Good Intentions And All That

You do that to me.
It's this frickin' 'lover's quarrel'
(Your phrase I'm stealing—
Not mine- though technically you
Haven't used it yet)
I mistakenly believe—
Why am I surprised,
You and I have this recurring
Sequence, like moisture licking
Stalactites one century at a time,
And I mistakenly believe
I have created you
But you turn on me.

There was a thought- no-
A beautifully romantic image
I was sure to express
And a single word—I
Put that word down—
It was supposed to be
My word—but you—you
Take hold of my mind with
My own word, and send me
To dripping caverns,
Fog-frosted bowlines,
Soil-moistened, arrow-frog
Kaleidoscopes of memories
I never had but wish were mine
All wrapped up, tied snugly
Into that single word
Which was supposed to
Say something
entirely different.

And now I'm standing in
A perfectly good sonnet
With wet shoes.
I know I said frickin'.
'Cause I'm feeling frickin'.

Perfectly good sonnet.
Hell, call it free verse.
I'm done.

Seamus O' Brian

Peace Was A River

When the gentle splashing of the paddles
is just a whisper across the memory
of a day on the river...

When the canoes are banked, quietly dripping
river's edge lapping, gently, only asking
for its beauty to be considered, not forgotten

Twilight shimmers, silvered waters glide past
hurrying after the memory of the sunset.
Laughter floats over the bank, occasional-
Forested children chasing the edge of day.

My chair settles slowly in the river's mud
Soon I must begin the inspection
Of firewood with grim nods of satisfaction
And just enough admiration
To sparkle the eyes of my son.

But not yet.

Soon we will defy the night
with marshmallows aflame, brandished
to laugh away fireside shivers
of chilly nights and tales of fright.

But not yet.

Soon, the cocoon-muffled giggles
will fade like the sparks that trace
the blackness of the star pierced night,
and I'll be alone with the embers of my fire.

But not yet.

For now I will pause for this eternal moment
and watch the memories of the day
glide by like the murmuring water.
Glide away like the days of my life.
Someone called this river Peace;

Someone like me.

Seamus O' Brian

Perhaps

Perhaps you thought I was as others;
Perhaps you thought I breathed
the air as others do, to live, and not
in fact to glean the flavor of life from
living; the pungent scent of the journey
from the colorful chaos of the trail;
perhaps you thought that my heart
beats to sustain my life,
and not, in fact, as the very applause
and celebration of my living;
perhaps you thought I sought favor,
the affirmations of human attention,
in no way understanding that I dwell
securely in the fortress of knowledge
that I am a small but integral function
of the totality of the universe,
absolutely distinct from
your kinetic oscillations,
your bioelectric perturbations,
your self-targeted ruminations.
Perhaps you forgot
or never considered
that I am I.

The celebration of my life
never needed your applause.

Seamus O' Brian

Primum Non Nocere (A Senryu)

Tragic at the worst,
In one's construction of verse
The rhyme that is firced.

Seamus O' Brian

Reflection

moonlight enshrouds frost
the fires of sun reflected
I am your moon

Seamus O' Brian

Refuge

I hide behind the slender stalks
of a certain scripted font;
yet, I shouldn't say certain-
because any font will do,
it's more the shadows cast
by the forms, the imagery
perhaps razored and incisive
like the battleship gray edge
of concertina wire drawing a
thin line of blood from
an inmate's flesh, as he leans
toward the smell of freedom wafting
in across the yard,
or perhaps hazy and ambiguous
like the pernicious muttering,
the judicious murmuring
intermittently
escaping from the bodies
huddled at the plaintiff's table,
puncturing the obligatory
marbled quiet of the oaken pews
as your sweaty fingers nervously
massage a thin hope
that on this day
justice will not be wrought.
Well, not you, because
you don't find yourself
peering out from behind
the perilously thin concealment
of these words
like I do.

Seamus O' Brian

Renaissance

The arbor of spring
Solemn oaks now fringed in green
Wedding rigid boys

Seamus O' Brian

Requiem For The End Of Time

were I to sit on the edge of the pier
beyond which floated the end of time
if I allowed my legs to dangle above
the wave-chopped sea of eternity
my hands reposed on the weathered edge
of the last defined shape of reality
my sky-bared shoulders warmly caressed
by the billowing rays of a dying sun
my sightless gaze transfixed upon
a nova's blaze, the end is come
the seagulls cry in slow descent
wheeling their arcs
like feathered hands,
measured beats
of a failing clock.

Tick.

Tock.

The peace in my heart would slowly rise
to greet a withered star's embered fires,
two sons of creation in final embrace
inferno's blaze joins serenity's gaze.

For I have lived and I have loved
And I have run on the sun-swept shore
with my little white dog
and children in tow.
I have thrown my laughter
into the aered heights
and tread the waves
of forgotten lakes.

I have witnessed my children
draw breath into life.
I have lived with every beat of my heart
in wonder, in grace, in gratitude.

And it is enough.

Tick.
Tock.

It is enough.

Seamus O' Brian

Responsibility Overridden (Senryu)

I ought to attend
To work but burn to set free
The haiku inside

Seamus O' Brian

Ridge Street

A gust of wind catches a fragment of paper
chases it around a funnel of nothing
then skips away to tussle the last sunflower
petal of September, and a drive-way parked dog
hoists the heaviness of an afternoon eyelid
against the weight of cumulus bound sunlight
before it droops downward having caught
just a moment of the fractional shift of
the entire universe drilled down to the
buzz of a bee and the kiss of the breeze
and five seconds of my life on Ridge Street.

Seamus O' Brian

Rituals Of Discovery

it was a rite of passage
the reflection of ascendancy
repeated for the fifth and last time
the summation of the best parts
of fatherhood whisked together
into dolphin kisses, shivering wetsuits
salted pretzels and skimming stingrays
the procession morphing from discovery
to anticipation, from routine to satisfaction;
reflecting with a strange but familiar symmetry
the grander task itself of conducting children
from the discovery of birth to the doorstep of life.
I can't separate in my mind the shimmering smile
of who glanced up at me when, with what kind
of bird on their arm or another, but the whole
is so much better than the parts, anyway.
Just like family.

Seamus O' Brian

Rush Hour

Slowly the silent gulls glide by
Weaving their lazy, evening course
In endless, undulating lines
Toward the peace of darkening shores.

Below the frantic pace of day
Gives way to darkness' peaceful weight.
Their windows shutter like closing eyes,
The merchants stretch with weary sighs.

The toil of day, the raucous play,
All submit to evening shrouds
As man to home attempts his way
And bird on wing ascends the clouds.

Weary commuters with final rush
Push home in crowded highway lines
As westward glows a golden blush
On silent gulls from sky to sky.

Seamus O' Brian

Senryu 16

hemp line shivers taut
barking shouts incite flurries
shipyard awakens

Seamus O' Brian

Senryu 17 O'brian

sun teased from chaos
quiet dark covers it all
but echoing souls

Seamus O' Brian

Senryu Beightol 10

you're giving your heart
little samples here and there
is anything left?

Seamus O' Brian

Senryu Beightol 11

how long is this day?
room one is a little late
suspect rectal warts

Seamus O' Brian

Senryu Beightol 12

i'm falling awake
my hand finds the place you lay
nothing but the cold

Seamus O' Brian

Senryu Beightol 13

ahh what can i say
if I offended the wind
once it's blown away

Seamus O' Brian

Senryu Beightol 8

history is not
what occurred; it is what I
think I remember

Seamus O' Brian

Senryu Beightol 9

Facing bankruptcy
The taste of chowder unchanged
Light of stars as well

Seamus O' Brian

Senryu O' Brian 24

our work accomplished
once part of me, now released
a drop of sweat falls

Seamus O' Brian

Senryu O' Brian 25

no space for doubt, spite
in a heart saturated
by love, surrounded

Seamus O' Brian

Senryu O'brian 19

(one last thought before I go)

my day is done now
my pen, still, upon the desk
filled with tomorrow

Seamus O' Brian

Senryu O'brian 20

tides flow in and out
people too. seas and hearts drift
set course by the stars

Seamus O' Brian

Senryu O'brian 21

your laughter its sound
in the garden of my heart
the hiss of a snake

Seamus O' Brian

Senryu O'brian 22

you take up your pen
to tattoo my heart with ink
from the River Styx

Seamus O' Brian

Senryu O'brian 23

this is foolishness
the one who gazes into
a mirror content

Seamus O' Brian

Serendipity

I mistook myself for another man
Or perhaps another man for me
The friend of a friend apparently
A friend of this friend I presumed to be

Words of tribute intended for him
I took for myself, yes—I know, foolishly
Arrogance, envy, both sins mortally
Devised my own lesson in humility.

So I closed back the door, discreetly I thought
Ashamed of myself, I tiptoed away
Not fast enough, dammit, her voice comes my way
You're a bungling oaf, but you're welcome to stay.

This friend of a friend has given me leave
The friend—not her friend; I hope you can see
The one that I thought mistook him for me
Was not mistaken my taking his identity.

But if it means in the end that his friend
is now a friend to the end in possibility
I think it well worth the dose of humility
To be blessed by a case of serendipity.

Seamus O' Brian

Shadowfall

Shadows are not citizens of darkness,
They dwell not in the murky ink of night
Nor hail from the deep troughs of space
That lap the silent, black seas of infinity.

Shadows neither rightly claim constituency
In the kingdom of the light, for they are
Mere interlopers, happenstance half-breeds,
Not quite light, not quite darkness, not quite
Anything.

They do not belong, but they are; they do not
Live, but they exist, they do not create, but
They appear, wherever there is light, and
Something to oppose it.

The untouchable essence of not quite light,
The half-cast bastard of stalking twilight
The nothingness that gives everythingness
Depth and contrast and the visible texture
Of reality.

The grey voids that creep together, drawing,
Reaching, touching, finding borders and margins
To merge together, stitching deeper and darker,
Finally, blanketing the earth in the vast shadow
Of night.

Seamus O' Brian

Some Day

I shall construct verse that rhymes some day
When I am older, wiser, and a bit more grey
And stooped over my desk pontificating away
Discovering obscure words that rhyme, let's say,
With neocolonialism.

'Til then, words will leap from my heart as they may
Like scruffy dogs who've run away for the day
And return to lie down on my page, panting away,
Much too tired for tricks, too tired to play
poetic nomianism.

Seamus O' Brian

Someone Has Pissed Off The Ph Gods

Sacrifices should be made,
but there are no virgins to be found
in all the land.
Perhaps we will be forced to round
up our caravans
and wander off to higher ground.

Seamus O' Brian

Sometimes

Sometimes I'm a man at the edge of the sea
Battling the waves with fists and arms bared
Swinging and lunging, salt-sprayed and heaving
Holding back a handful of sea and a mouthful of spray.
A lifetime of days; an ocean of waves
And tomorrow will bring the incoming tide
And I'll stagger once more into the oncoming surge
Baring my arms and thanking the Lord
For eyes to see and legs to stand
For it has to be done, and I am a man.

But sometimes between the stinging blasts
Of the buffeting wind; sometimes between
The bellicose blows of the frothy gray sea,
Sometimes I feel the tentacles of doubt
Creeping, scaling the walls of my mind;
Siege towers of uncertainty assaulting
The keep of my will with whispers, eroding
The tower of my resolve with the hissing black oil
Of accusations, recriminations.

And sometimes
I am just afraid.
Sometimes
I just need to hear
Another voice in the wind.
Sometimes
I just need to feel
The strong grasp of another hand.
But it has to be done, and I am a man.

Seamus O' Brian

Sometimes When The Internet's Down

Sometimes when the internet's down
I think some thoughts.

My fingers fidget, and the spinning icon taunts,
But when the links don't link, and the silence
Of the screen fails to tell me what to think
I think of something else.

Of somewhere else.
Of sometime else- or someone else.
But these thoughts belong to me. Not borrowed
Or programmed or directed.

And I remember what I was before I was
A status. Before my wonder of the world
Was the answer to a Google search.
Before my relationships were itemized
In pull down menus.

When being 'liked' looked like a smile
Or a wagging tale.
When 'poking' my kids caused giggles-
sofa squirming, wriggling giggles
and autofill was five kids in the back seat

Sometime when the internet's down,
I remember who I am.

Seamus O' Brian

Somewhere Between Forever And The Sea (A)

summer rains remind me
of those drowsy afternoons-
soft comforter caressing
my pajama-ed, sunburnt skin-
skin salty with the memory
of a morning by the sea.
footprints chasing, bare feet racing,
down the wave-erasing strip
of sand beside the sea

grey windows tap and blur
the puddle-splashing grass below
green blades bend and drink,
worn pages turn and then
whisper, whisper
further on, further on...
but eyelids falter now
as faint thunder grumbles on.
And I am somewhere else
Somewhere else
Beyond forever and the sea

Seamus O' Brian

Song Of Solitude

Down in the granite rocks
Down where the fire of the sun
And the breath of winter's ice
Cleave the sinews of the
Mountain, splay the fractured
Hoards of earthen bones
Heaped up round the
Fist of God- that bowl of alpine
Frost, floating the reflection
Of heaven upon her silvered
Skin. Down in the rocks,
Down in the granite cracks
By the shores of Solitude,
The fairy trumpet grows
Yes, the fairy trumpet grows.

Under the eye
of Paintbrush Divide
the Marmots call
and the Pikas dance
and the mountains fall
one pebble at a time,
and I left you there
where the fairy trumpet grows.
I left you there
Down on the rocks
By the shore of Solitude.

O'er the towering divide,
Down her canyoned veins
Down the talus seams
Heaped up like bouldered
Drifts, down through
Swales of evergreen halls
The sound of my boots
Hurrying along, hurrying along
While the Pikas danced
and the marmots called,
you waited for me there

Where the fairy trumpet grows
Where the fairy trumpet grows.

When the summer sun slips
From the canyon walls,
When the foot falls fade
From the high alpen trails
When the cold eye of heaven
Glints on the twilight-silvered
Surface of rippled Solitude,
The fairy trumpet wilts
Down the granite fissured rocks
And I come to hear you whisper
While the little Pikas dance,
And the worried marmots call.

The mist of Solitude
Rises to her banks
Climbs into the cracks
Of the granite fissured rocks,
But you're no longer there
Where the fairy trumpet grows

Where the fairy trumpet grows.

Seamus O' Brian

Song Of Solitude (A)

Down in the granite rocks
Down where the fire of the sun
And the breath of winter's ice
Cleave the sinews of the
Mountain, splay the fractured
Hoards of earthen bones
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Where the fairy trumpet grows.

Seamus O' Brian

Spaces

There are spaces between the words

Intervals of Quantum silence
Pixels blank whose whiteness
Heavier than meanings forced
By language clumsy, coarse.

A sigh. A glance. A hand
to the chin of a face averted.
No pithy phrase, no clever rhyme
Can bend the fabric of the soul
Quite So much as a breath exhaled
in slow surrender...

When restrained by the gravity
Of life, the prisoner of a chair
Unseeing though constrained to stare
Wordlessly pondering
As life passes by
the window beyond
In the spaces between the words.

The crescendo of angry men
The bravado of fiery youth
With an urgent cause borrowed
Or burned into their yielding breasts
By the cruelty of injustice
Or the greater cruelty of misfortune.

A mother heaves her anguished sobs
Into the arms that surround her
But cannot comfort her; cannot
stanch the blood that runs
through slab gray streets red
like the tears of God.

In the spaces between the pain

In the spaces between the hate.

In the spaces between the words.

A man grips his camera lovingly
Calloused hands bruise the child
whose walls of cloistered innocence
are breached by filthy pulchritude
To be peddled like soap or magazines
To weasels decomposing in their seats.

And the gray rain streaks my window's pane
Like the tears I do not cry
Like the words I do not have
Like the worlds of pain between each line

In the spaces between the words.

Have mercy on us all, O God
Breathe a draft of love upon
The walls of hate we build between
What we are, and what we ought to be.
Take our words and throw them all to hell

But give us spaces small but filled
With love, with grace, with tenderness.
Like the space between the words
You wept.

Seamus O' Brian

Star Fall

When the stars fall from the heavens
like angels immersed in eternity's gaze
abandon their posts of glory to quench
their radiance in pools of black ignominy.

When the chariots of heaven fall to the earth
Trailing smoke and fire that dissipates
to the sound of crickets and rustling pines
and the sky of the night is silent once more,

The glimmering of stars arrayed on their thrones
of velvety night question the fallen,
'For trinkets of time and passions that fail,
You have traded a birthright of God and kings.

Why?

Were not the glories of heaven enough for you? '

And from darkness replies
a clenched whispered voice
'I will...
I will...
I will...'

As galaxies shudder and bowing stars turn
Majesties humbled and troubled by one
Who wandered from grace and will not come home.

Seamus O' Brian

Stealing Your Future

When tearful pleas turn to anger
That moment when the tears stop
The head comes up sharply
And the eyes are cold with anger.

Not you.
Not me.

The legs that couldn't even dangle
Over the edge of the couch.
The eyes that peered out
From under the brims of
A hundred hats made more
Beautiful by the wonder of your eyes.

Eyes that repel what I am to you now
The one who keeps you from your future
Who holds back what I could give if I
Loved you enough to trust you more.

Words that are etched into the screen
By the knives of a heart that burns
In angry disbelief and questions
All that has come before
With words paralyzed blankly
Upon a silent screen.

A thousand lives live and die
Between each blink of a cursor
That accuses me of patriarchal cruelty
As a father's heart dies inside beating
Like that cursor, and a thousand
Questions course with each beat

A thousand doubts, a thousand whys.
And I don't know how to be a father
But to trust the voice that love speaks
With into my heart to proceed with care
To fight for her heart, even though

Fighting looks like holding back
The one thing you ask.

To place my hand upon the place
Where pain strangles my heart
And yet,
To trust the quiet
Whisper of God.

I know that on the other side
of this mountain of what we wish we knew
You are trudging through the tortured
Machinations of your day,

Just like me, a pair of ghosts
With dire responsibilities laid
Across our shoulders like the beams
Of a cross, with the wooden stake of
Fear thrust through our hearts

And blood and water and pain
Come gushing out while the thief
Of my conscience calls out to me
To heal myself and my children-
If I am really a father-

And I cannot.

Seamus O' Brian

Sufficient

my heart was carried alone
into this world walled off
by the malleable flesh
that would set into various
increasingly capacious versions
of me—walled off
from a particular species of love
which would both expel it
and receive it and in various
degrees of irresponsible innocence
and reasonable acts of omission
bear witness as
the rapiers of life plunged through
the negligibly defensible walls of flesh
to strike the beating core of myself
with sufficient force and frequency
to kill what I might have otherwise
been.

Moses wriggling in his frail willow basket
found not by a princess but by the spears
of the guards who drew courage and strength
from the destruction of the weak and unfamiliar,
an infant birthed from the amnion of the Nile not as
a hero but as a miscarriage heaved to the shore.
But even as the laughter and derision folded
into the whispering chafe of the river-marching reeds,
the arms of the Nile gathered up the boy, and took
his child-wrapped heart back to her onyx-splayed depths.

Monuments rose, flood plains filled and receded, and
when the final shaft of the Archer fell, the blue lotus
flowered and a man emerged from the river's vault,
neither champion nor deliverer, just a simple man
endowed with the gift to navigate the currents
of heaven and hell, bestowed with the strength
and agility to walk the heights of Olympus;
carrying within a heart sufficiently pierced
to hear the whispers of God.

Seamus O' Brian

Sundial

The sun circles this tombstone
This sundial of mortified bones
Measuring the interval from birth
'Til we lay down to rest in the earth.
Each tick of the clock, each tilt of the sun
Is a shovel of dirt when the digging's begun.
An unblinking fire circles o'erhead
A buzzard inspecting the soon-to-be dead
Ignoring each tick of the down running clock
He burned with such haste his larders to stock
With all manner of rubbish that fades, rusts and rots
Never grasping the treasure, each tick of the clock.

Seamus O' Brian

Take Me Back

take me home.

take me back to that burnt-grass studded, sand pitted patch we called a yard that was 9 parts weed and 1 part florida sand and only felt cool because it was 2 degrees cooler than the gutter-lined tar melting streets that burnt the cataracts into my eyes on those july afternoons when the nimbus clouds climbed the shoulders of the world trying to get out Florida like everybody else with a car and a tank of gas.

take me back to the flash-bang lightning grenades and bumble bee stinging thunderstorm raindrops that welted barefoot boys racing home on steaming streets; cut off jean shorts that would only dry after 2 glasses of grape Kool-aid had purple mustached us all and hotels had gone up on Boardwalk and Park Place.

take me back to Gilligans Island and when I believed in trees with brown fuzzy coconuts and that if you were honest and true everything would work out just fine before the last commercial break, and nobody snickered if you climbed a pile of dirt, stuck out your chest and proclaimed 'Truth, Justice and the American Way! '

take me back to that school I pretended to hate, to lines of children wandering from fractions to lunch and segregated for cootie hygiene, where the only medicine for ADD was hanging in the principal's office and we didn't sharpen pencils for sharper pencils but to look out the window and plot our recess.

To pledging allegiance and wondering if the Emergency Broadcast System would ever broadcast an emergency, to head-down desktop naps and secretly praying that God would give me a girlfriend before He unleashed Armageddon.

I pledged my allegiance and I sang through the rockets' red glare and I believed in those fuzzy brown coconuts. I believed in Truth and Justice and the American Way. I believed that if I was Trustworthy, Loyal, Helpful, Friendly, Courteous, Kind, Obedient, Cheerful, Thrifty, Brave, Clean, and Reverent that everything would always work out just fine. I believed that Government was good and that

public servants served the public. That those sworn To Protect and Serve would protect and serve.

I've grown up, though. I've seen what real coconuts look like. I've held good people as their life drained out through bullet holes; I've listened to children with downcast eyes lie about the bruises on their bodies to protect the only 'love' they've ever known. I've watched men die on Youtube because of the color of their skin. I've had the hard realities of this life grind the prism of my vision so that I can see the complexities that I never would have appreciated from the perspective of the worn green carpet from which a young boy wondered why they couldn't find some plumber who could fix that Watergate once and for all or find some planes and bring our boys home. I've learned through the years that even when the boys do come home, it's never truly the same home they left behind, and that the past I believed in was not even the past I thought it was.

So I can't go home. And that lawn jart studded patch of weeds is just a bioelectric pattern buried somewhere inside three pounds of human brain tissue. Yet somewhere in those three pounds there is also a compass, a compass structured not of steel but fashioned from the beyond-the-years and beyond-the-horizons wisdom of a gentle country preacher known to most as Norman Groves, but known to me simply as Pastor. By the long under-appreciated guidance of an exasperated single mother, administered faithfully through equal parts parental advice, industrious example, and the very necessary application of leather to bottom. A compass grounded in a faith that the years have only strengthened and the latitudes have only validated.

A compass that leads me, not to a better place, but- God willing- leads me to become a better man.

A compass that guides me as I try to build what my children will one day remember as home.

Seamus O' Brian

That Thing In Your Hand

That thing in your hand
You think you bought it
But who owns whom?
How do you feel
When it's hidden from sight?
Is that a bead of sweat,
A glint of fear in your eye?
You huddle around them
As if all of the texture
of the universe around you,
the wonders that surround you
Were nothing, it seems,
To the pixels and sounds
From a three by five screen.
Who is the master,
And who is the slave?
Disconnect the wi-fi,
(Ha! are you feeling brave?)
Hide all the chargers
And watch the world
Go mad.
Who is the owner,
And who is owned?
Nero played his violin
Enflamed by the fires of Rome;
We play Pokemon
With the fate of the world at stake
And it can burn in the fires of hell
Just so long as there's a selfie left to take.

Seamus O' Brian

The Advantage Of Haiku

Haiku is perfect
For writers, readers like me
Blessed with A.D.D

Seamus O' Brian

The Adventure

birth
my chaos
begun

a life
springs
forth

love's
a summer
alive

years
my hopes
unmet

peace
found in
death

a body
fuel for
earth

Seamus O' Brian

The Captain I Was

As he once more guided the frame of his bed
into the darker currents of evening's drift,
he thoughtfully plucked his favorite stars
from the obsidian slate of the night
and rolled them carefully into the velvet
of his dreams. In the intervals between
each discreetly precise thrum-tock of
the wizened old clock governing the hall,
he forages quietly through
the half-opened drawers and wandering piles
of dog-eared gazettes, the surfeited
gleanings of a 12 year old's mind.

Here's a chart of the delta of Okavango,
a well-worn map of the Straits of Malacca,
a treatise on snaring turtles at sea,
and, finally, there...well, his craft is adrift
in the gentle lapping of the rhythm of sleep.

He has the North Star in his pocket
and a mapcase in his mind,
and his prow is aimed for those horizons
where his heart already sails.

Seamus O' Brian

The Corner Of Yesterday's Garden

There, just beyond the maple
(you remember, the maple
from which Alex fell-
fractured the ulna, I think it was)
where the ground is rather loamy
toward the wall. Yes, that's
where all the kids bunched
up when they ran their
races under the harvest
moon, laughing hysterics
and tugging at each other.
Right, that's the section
we repaired at first,
each stone heaved into place,
you instigated me
with your giggling promises
of sandy kisses.
The rabbit we surprised,
do you remember?
Like cannon shot from
that little clump of daffodil-
just there-
rather a fright, I'd say, we
collapsed into a howling
bundle of arms and legs
running away, but into each
other instead,
and suddenly lips and hands
finding each other, tasting
love and earth and sweat
- the taste of our garden.
Do you remember?

Kneeling down to touch the soil
self-consciously avoiding
the silence of an empty
garden.

The Fear Of Living

We glut our living into the moments of every day;
The footfalls of our scurried existence
Pounding out the years one after the other
All the while chin over our shoulders peering
Wide-eyed behind in the terror that leaches the life
Out of every minute we spend fleeing
The shadow of death.

Through summers and winters we scramble
Harried and breathless, we pant away our yesterdays
Grasping and lunging for every tomorrow
Desperately trying to stay one pace away
From the leisured procession of death.
And, finally, we arrive, broken and empty,
Depleted and exhausted at the very doorstep
Of the one thing from which we spent
Our entire lives fleeing.

But I!
I do not run from you, death.

I do not fear you, death.

I stand at the gateway of this and every year
With my arms open wide to embrace you
If you shall come my way.
I do not fear you, because I have learned your secret:
You are as much a part of life as living itself.
You are the night which is more than
The absence of day.

I do not fear you, death;
I fear only the fear of living.

Seamus O' Brian

The Gardener

The gardener's hands,
Gnarled roots of mahogany
draw down the branch
from its arching perch loftily
against the blue of April's sky,
Gently pulls it close
to his wizened, piercing eyes.

Perhaps in the silence
Of a moment timeless
A flight of ibis
flutter white
Against the green of the mangrove,

But the face of the gardener
Perhaps for the age of a sun
Perhaps for the moment
Of a fluttered wing
Remains unmoved
Like a lichen-graven boulder
Clutched by the roots
of a crag-born alder.

Gnarled finger roots
Tremble, seem to stroke
the skin of this pertinacious
limb.

The eyes of the gardener
Flecked with the memory
Of a daughter's wedding dance
fog as away they glance
at an ibis trailing white,
and gnarled fingers gather
'round the polished oaken handle
of a razored pruning shear.

Seamus O' Brian

The Grey Sea

How wide is this grey sea stretched across
My soul without crag of shore to rim its vastness
or continent to impale its monotony?
Where wander these waves that ripple outward
Carrying adrift the flotsam of my existence
To shoreless eternities, those cocoa brown
Eyes of my first art teacher, the gnarled braids
Of oaken roots where my first kiss failed,
The names of so many who have walked
This journey with me, yet are no more;
Specks of debris, floating upon waves
Disappearing each by each, first from
life, then from memory, lost to
The depths of the great grey sea.
The kaleidoscopic chaos of reality
A projection of mere biochemistry
Will fuse its animated memory
To the particles of soil which gave birth to me
In darkness, and in darkness once more swallow me,
Darkness with darkness, circle complete
Yet what becomes of the great, grey sea?

Seamus O' Brian

The Interval Of Love

Across the depths of forever
In whispered trembles of desire
My lips have chased your name.
Beside the sea of loneliness I wander,
And with each footfall impress eternity
As my ears endure the absence of your voice
And hunger for one word breathed
To pass from your lips to my heart
And savor every texture of sound
Formed by the perfection of your mouth.
Yet here the emptiness of this abandoned
Breast, the frigid hollow of a robin's nest
Grasped by the lifeless void of winter,
So this emptiness within my chest
Where once upon your head would rest,
And pass between two bodies,
The heartbeat of one love.

Seamus O' Brian

The Morgue Of Once-Promising Poetry

Doffing my top hat and waving
dynamically with a touch
of doubtfully reluctant optimism,
I stand these words up on their edge
hoping their balance and form
might elicit, if not breathless applause,
at least some nodded approval.

I goad them and harry them
plead and implore, and in return
sometimes they leap magnificently
through hoops of fire, sometimes ascend
amidst the sulfuric smoke and fire
and pageantry of linguistic fireworks,
and sometimes they just tip over on their
little Times New Roman pedestals
and lay there flat and lifeless.

I sit here, blank eyed, wondering if
I should put my lips to this wan stanza
here and try to blow some life into it,
break out some minuscule code blue
font paddles and shock some attitude
into this listless line that began
with such promise in my mind
then withered on the page...

But perhaps instead I shall send it
straight to the morgue
of once-promising poetry.

Seamus O' Brian

The Panama Kid

The Panama Kid rode out of sight
Shaking the dust of our lives
From his boots.

At the edge of the town this little boy stood,
Sifting a fistful of sand through his upturned hands.
And watching it blow away, blow away

In the tumbleweed wind.

The empty streets tense-
Wordless accusations.
Heavy the silence of the false-front shops;
Shadow faces glimpsed behind elaborate facades,
Familiar strangers all.

Five blank faces like a poorly dealt hand
Stare at one another in tired resignation.
A single thought in common—
The unspoken question—

When he got up from the table, turned his back
Upon the game,
When he folded on the table this unwanted hand,

When the swinging doors echoed
In the coolness of the night—

Was there discord in his heart,
Was there trouble in his eyes?

One legged crow on a sagging steeple calls
"Gone...gone, " in the tumbleweed wind.

And the Panama Kid rode out of sight
Shaking the dust of our lives
From his boots.

A little boy stands at the edge of town

Tumbleweed freed by the roots.

Thirty years later I stand at the side
Of the Panama Kid, and I look into his eyes
I see the pain of all these years carved into the lines
I hear the discord of his heart stumble from his lips

I hear the whisper of the wind blowing in the holes

'Gone....gone....'

Whispers the wind through the five holes left
By the unforgotten hand dealt to the heart
of the Panama Kid, whose trembling lips
Mutter 'Gone...gone...'

And the dust of our lives swirl away
together
In the fading whisper of the tumbleweed wind.

Seamus O' Brian

The Princess Of Joyabaj

Eyes that dance in circles of fire
Blackest discs of moonless nights
Float on burnished nutmeg leather,
A pool of whitest pearl surrounds
This sensuous dance of Mayan fire.

Lightning fills the summer sky
The flashing grace of her generous smile
Shivers arrows of aching beauty to pierce
Those upon whom its radiance falls
Tempting a hunger for what cannot be.

Her playful lips purse and pout,
Each delicate, voluptuous
Upturned curve inviting, forbidding,
Always warning of treacherous depths
Where pleasures are promised
But never escape.

The shimmering black of silken strands
Gathered and pinned, pertly bounce
With every jaunt of her arching neck,
Hand on her hip, smile on her lips,
The Princess of Joyabaj will not be denied.

Outstretched hand, fingers beckon,
My heart hearing whispers
Her lips never spoke
To sway in the dance of her ancient fire
On the cobbled streets of Joyabaj.

Arms raised high, cafe con leche
Against the midnight blue
Of her Mayan camisa, embroidered
With shafts of volcanic rainbow,
Her skirt is rustling, her hips are swaying

And I find my heart singing
The words to a song

Already ancient when
Cortez was born.

The musical timbre of her sparkling laugh
Like the sun-scattered mist
On the jungle-greened heights
Fades with the memory of a touch and a smile
The hauntingly beautiful princess will dance
Down the cobbled stone streets
of my heart yet a while.

Seamus O' Brian

The Question Of Your Heart

There you stand, my dear, with the question
of your heart still fresh upon your lips, and I know
you fear my answer, but, hush, first!

Let me touch you with my eyes, a touch
softer than the whisper of a lonely sparrow,
let me trace the pools of your eyes
with finger tips moistened by a dream of
loneliness and the memory of laughter,
and as I trace softly the edge of your
desire, if I feel the shudder of surrender
I will swaddle you in the shadows of my
dreams and carry you across
the foam-flecked valleys of the deep
green sea to the stone-wreathed vales
Of Donnegal. Ah, there, my love,
I will hide you in the land of flint-grey stone
and deep green field where the cairns of rock
older than the whispered memory of time
watched in grim silence as this granite heart
once learned the stumbling steps of love.

And high above in the cold, free air
of this wild and broken land, the stony pyres
will peer down again through the mist-rimmed heights
where we will walk the edge of the black-pooled nights
and you will teach my lips to speak the names
of everything you love,
and you will trace my fingers across
every scar that life has given you
so that the kiss of my fingers
can drown every memory of pain
in the deepest waters of pleasure
born from a sea of love.

Hush, my dearest, for upon my lips
is the answer to every question I am.

The Road To Joyabaj

Heaven pierced the rim of the world
This morning in two gashes laid upon
The flinty grimness of a gray horizon
Through which the glories of heaven-
A cascade of golden light
Fell in radiant streams upon
A world hardened and grayed
By a deficit shaped like the absence
Of the color of love
A world dominated and contorted
By a single species
Capable of selfless compassion, yet
Intent on selfish annihilation
By the desiccation of brotherly love
Sucked from the earth like marrow
from the bone of every contention.
Four sleepy souls in a speeding Rover
Green as the skin of a ripe avocado
Rumble on toward the gashes of heaven
Tipping their timid hearts upward
Praying for rivulets of glory to fall
Around them, upon them, through them
To touch the earth and its children
With the color of love
With the color of light
With the color of life.
With the cascades of heaven.

Seamus O' Brian

The Sea Of My Regret

I stand at the edge
of the sea of my regret
and wave after wave
crashes at my feet
and I hear your name
in every one.

I stand at the edge
of the ocean of all
my mistakes and I
call your name into
the waves and the wind
and the sky above
but the clouds are not moved
the waves do not cease
and the wind carries
the sound of only one heartbeat,
and it is not yours.

I stand at the edge
of the sea of loneliness
The waves swirl around
my knees and I plunge forward
but I know that there is only
one shore to this ocean
and I have left it behind me.

Seamus O' Brian

The Vault Of Torment

Where is the ventricle that bears
this ballast of foolishness burning
within my heart with the sinking weight
of a history of pleasure never, and
never to be, known?
What cruelty of design that the distillation
of beauty pure and innocent might
run through the chest of a man
like the fires that gnaw at the bones
of the earth? How can a thing that
glows as warmly radiant as the reflection
of the divine, shimmering gently from
the surface of the knowledge of loveliness
itself, smolder within me like some fiery star
fallen from the mortally irresistible vales
of Elysium itself, and come to rest within
the deep caverns of my soul?
From whence is this pain?
Is there a mind within this thoracic vault
sentient to the power of beauty, yet fully
knowledgeable of the exile of my desire
from the reality of its grasp?
Why will you not save me,
You who have made me
so defenseless to such beauty, yet
so offended by its power?
What trial is this upon the soul of man,
that the power of your own fingers
might craft and shape not only
the form of elegance itself,
but yet again the heart
by which it is pierced?
Where in the stars of heaven
or within the flames of hell might be found
a relief from this torment?
Alas, damned that it be, alone
in the knowledge that I bear the pain
common to the hearts
of all men.

Seamus O' Brian

The Weight Of The Mountain

The wind blows
scraping over the rocks
howling through the hallways
of untread stone
calling my name
reminding me I am but dust
telling me to forget the dreams of
sunlight, the unencumbered dancing
on the flowered grasses of the valley.

So i gather up the burden of the mountain
and I rise.
Through skin and muscle and sinew
sink the weight of the tresses
and yet I rise
To tread the stones of cruelty
to shrug aside the chill
blade of the wind
in its relentless pursuit.

But I will raise my chin
to the unseen line of the horizon
lost to sight but not to hope.
And against the howling lies of the wind
I will stumble the words
of a song I know not yet but will

Yes I am dust.
Yes I bear the scars of a thousand blows.
Yes I hear nothing but the taunts of the wind
Taste nothing but the grime of the trail
See nothing but the gloom of the rocks
Feel nothing but the jagged teeth of the crags
and the weight of the mountain.

But I will not forget the kiss of sunlight
Nor the forgiving coolness of the valley stream
Nor the comforting mercy of the meadow green.

Yes I am dust
But I remember.

Seamus O' Brian

The Widest Blue

There is a certain blue dress
The summer sky slips into
When she has a mind to
Crease your heart
With a burning
Pain of nostalgia
For that perfect day
Of blue and white and water
Laughing and splashing
The sun from the sky
To the salty horizon
With the best friends
You ever had and
Never saw again.

Should your attention relent
To lesser portents,
Her jealousy is evident
By her cobalt radiance
Graduating to the luminous white
Of her cloud-trimmed horizons.
Seducing you with memories
Lying back on the stern
Simply a dot on a lake
of the widest, blue blue
Staring into the radiant abdication
Of a summer sky,
Widening circles of life
Rippling days and years
That pass on from now
To nevermore.

Seamus O' Brian

There Is A Man With A Broken Heart

There is a man with a broken heart,
And if you could piece those splinters
Back together one fragment of memory
At a time, one treasured syllable
Of fondness and dearness and promise
Of neverending-ness at a time,
You'd still have a heart with a
fractured void at its core
And somewhere a woman whose
chrysalis of love is the same shape
as that fractured void and somewhere
along the way the luminescent butterfly
of love beating its wings with syllables
of fondness and dearness and promises
of neverending-ness, crawled back
into that chrysalis, became a worm,
and died,
killing two hearts
at one time.

Seamus O' Brian

These Eyes

these eyes, the spyglass of tomorrow's horizons
gazing today, even now, bronze-bound discs of living glass,
glazed and rimmed in the hazing blast of yesterday's furnace
to see, not merely with eyes of insentient flesh, but with sight
kilned in every crucible stumble of a pilgrim's broken journey,
shaped and formed by the guilt of a thousand more than countless
failures, tempered by the brutal pain of climbing beyond
hopelessness and helplessness, vision honed in the staggering
through the darkness of night and soul where a single candle
would be a home, would be a lover, would be salvation.

To see with eyes unclouded by the doubt of those
whose envy strands the ligatures that would bind
my future to my past. No, through the murky shadows
of today, I force these eyes to look upon, to discern
that coruscating vision of tomorrow, forging triumph instead
from every painful stride of yesterday.

Seamus O' Brian

They Are Farmers

they are farmers
they grind away the cartilage
of their lives prying open
the earth; they labor with
their forceps of steel and wood
kneeling before the womb
of the earth inducing the delivery
of each stone in sweat and pain
from the matrix of the soil, stacking
each upon the other to erect walls
of rock that will circumscribe
their hope for another day of living.

with blades of steel dragged across
the crust of the soil they pierce
the epidermis of the earth, the
compacted detritus of millennia:
decomposing leaves thrust
downward underfoot, disintegrated
bones of conquistadors belched
upward, fossilized flesh of worms
which fed upon kings and whores
ground down to dust having
never seen a glow of dawn
or glaze of starlight until
the stone-hardened hands
thrust a plow into the callous
of the earth, to tear it open
and drop within it a tiny receptacle
of life. every step forward weighted
by the past, the memories of his forefathers
layered in his heart like rings of a tree,
yet his eyes fixed forward on the horizon
beyond which perhaps will sprout
all the tomorrows of his children.

Seamus O' Brian

This Tawdry Procession

This tawdry procession of locust-eaten leaves, stacking the witness box with silent, ragged wounds of vacant nothingness, ulcerated voids of lost potential, missing fingers unpointing their accusations at me, what might have been, should have been, the corpse of this life riddled with the maggots of my inabilities, my undone deeds, my un-planned failures.

Dance, you zombied corpse!
Dance, you putrefied caricature of life! For you are all that is left of me. Jig your rotting limbs in celebration of all the aspirations manufactured through all these years of day-dreamed almost potential, all the nodding expectations of the would-be congratulators, now wagging their heads at the sight of your chattering wounds, the purulent seepage of your rancid hope, draining away into that hardened soil, sprouting nothing from the magic beans for which I traded everything.
Yes, I stand accused;
what is my plea?
Guilty-~-of everything.

Seamus O' Brian

Tide, Rising

There is a hunger down in the channels
of my being, somewhere aground
on the tidal shoals of my inward currents,
the slack tide lapping against some
obstruction, some indefinable mass
rocking slightly in the wavering
uncertainty of who I am,
razored edge of barnacle masses,
clumping about protrusions of
regret and guilt, spiking the silt,
touching some raw, living layer
with each shifting wave, sending
vibrations of visceral discomfort
throughout my being, as if the edge
of today was some probing point
set to discover the cavitory decay
of all my tomorrows.

A tattered sail flutters from this
sand-barred ship, each snap
of the torn edge speaks my name
to the winds sent to devour this
inefficient composition of dust
and soul, and my futility dissolves
as the silt reclaims the ship upon
whose stern my name once belonged.

And the rising tide carries away
the memory of a voyage once
imagined, once attempted, yet
forever remembered as mine.

Seamus O' Brian

Time Pieces Of Infinity

Far beyond the thoughts of man
sweep the stars in their regal procession
from eternity to eternity;
far beyond the minds of man
to number the time pieces of infinity
from the quivering atoms of helium
faithfully pacing fractions of time
far tinier than the most fragile
thought of a man,
biding each moment to rupture
itself and release a delicate
impulse of light,
to the vast, wrathful lords
of darkness, the voracious
consuming rulers of eternity,
the terrible blackness from
which nothing escapes; warlords
of space-time chaos who shriek
madness and terror and nothingness.

And all in between the vastness between
the thoughts of God, the dancing of the stars,
the spinning of the quasars, the obedient turn
of orbiting planets, nebulae expanding,
the eternal breath of divinity, unfolding
in the origami dance of aeons inconceivable,
and somewhere in the void of infinity
a clod of molten iron and soil
and water and sky
marks a degree of orbital passage,
an unheard, unseen tick of the
clock eternal, noted only by
the scratch of a child's hand upon paper,
"Happy Birthday, Daddy"

And I am fifty.

Seamus O' Brian

Tired Of Today

In the master bedroom
above the bed, just to the right
of where I usually sleep
there is a dent in the wall

The clock whose corner
matches the dent
can no longer be found.

Just a memory of fury
unleashed on a clock
and a wall.
The scar on two hearts
words flung like a clock
Hearts bruised like a wall

When hell is in the ring
nobody wins
just two beaten fighters
holding the ropes
praying tomorrow comes soon.

Seamus O' Brian

Too Soon

Too soon the fingers of December
Have found me here in September
A chill tug at my sleeves
A whisper of crimson leaves
Head huddled, pace quickened
The days of my life tumbling by
Wind blown leaves
Against September's leaden sky.

Where has summer gone?

Seamus O' Brian

Tread Carefully

The branches dance in the wind,
The ones outside my window
Across from my desk.
I suppose you know the trees
Of which I speak, for I've written
Oft of their power over me.

Refractors of emerald sunlight
Bending their wavelengths
To the frequency of my soul,
Trampolines of splashing raindrops,
Tangoed partners to the rhythm of the wind
But one thing I've never told you,
One thing you need to know!
The branches, they talk to me.
The branches, they've told me
Who you are.

Perhaps it's because I have
Grafted myself into the woods
And the lonely places where only
The love of rock and stone and
Wildness carries me,
Perhaps it is because the song
Of the wood and the streams
And the high places where
Sky and mountain mingle
Without border, and where
My soul was reforged with
Timber and stone;
Perhaps because they
See me not as a man
At a desk, but as a brother
Bound in the intimacy
Of breathing each other's
Breath, sharing a single heart,
Perhaps for this reason alone
They have told me who you are.

If you wish to know me,
You must be willing to walk
Among the cliffs where
Loneliness is my shelter.
You must be able to huddle
against the winds of the abyss
and listen to the whisper of the zephyr,
place your ears to the lips
of men lying in the gutter,
to the ground up from which
wells the groans of humanity.
for this is the path of the poet.

If you wish, instead, to merely
Drink from my cistern,
You will find the water cold and sweet
But it will leave within you
A hollowness as deep as
The soul of the mountain
And a heaviness as vast
as the grief of humanity.

Step you carefully,
you who would tread
the heart of a poet.

Seamus O' Brian

Two Miles Back

A picture is worth 432 words in this case
or thereabouts

Seamus O' Brian

Underestimating Macbeth

You think you know me;
Your eyes measure me
In terms of the honor I
Wear, the title by which
I am addressed, the fine
Linens that cover me,
the comforts I enjoy,
and you think
You know me.
Your lying lips address
A king, you bow and grin,
Assuming I was born
Into nobility, eased gently
to this position of honor.
You know not that I am
The miscarriage of peasants
Knotted and gnarled by
The teeth of the earth
And the bones of hell,
Carved by the wind from the
mountains and ice; forged
from this land by sweat and blood;
That the crown on my head
Was ripped from the ground
By the edge of the sword
That is pointed even now
At the blackness of your
Lying, pretending heart.

'Lay on, Macduff,
And damned be him who first cries,
'Hold, enough! "

Seamus O' Brian

Wake

your casket
cradles more than you
my heart too

Seamus O' Brian

Wanderer

Listen, O Wind, wanderer free
Camped within this carnate tent
A chained soul is, who'd rather be
A weary traveler whose back is bent
To a new land
And led by thee.

Seamus O' Brian

We Can't Help Ourselves

Tangential is a poet's word
to be brandished in unexpected
circumstances such as moonscapes
tangential to the bellicosity of my
gamekeeper's amalgamated heart.
The linguistic twerking of poets
Lathered in the sweat of stretching
meaning across unrequited canyons
eviscerated of understanding
is tangential yet ob-LIG'-atory
to the languid luminosity,
torqued empty socket
of an unsolilloquied reader.

Forgive us, readers.

We are tangential at
best.

Seamus O' Brian

We Carry On

the blade is tossed aside
unlikely to be divulged
by a week's worth of shrubbery;
perhaps it may be forgotten over
the distance of multiple hedgerows
of conversation—that is from the handle
side, but from the cutting edge—not so
likely. There's no question whose
blood smears apocryphal plaintives
across the length of that blade,
for it is my hand that still holds
pressure against the seepage of
sun-splashed picnic laughter,
sunset toe-kissing wavelets,
Sunday morning pillow-softened giggles,
stanching years of treasured complicity
spurting from one hour of blood-letting
rage.

The low softness of your voice
nuzzles its familiar warmth against me,
your movements of easy intimacy
whisper that swords and hedgerows
have passed far beyond the boundary
of your consciousness' keep.
My lips move in silent forgiveness,
but do I forgive if I still flinch
at your touch? Is this bitterness
that yet throbs like a wound
at the sound of your voice
speaking words of love?
Can I forgive and yet
be something other than
whole?
The memory of my own scars
upon your heart bears testament
that pain and forgiveness
are two facets, inseparable and essential,
of the currency of love.
So we bandage each other's wounds

as best we can, and carry on.

Seamus O' Brian

We Trudge

we trudge across this trackless void
toward the mountains which never move
shoulder to shoulder, billions of souls
flow as the ocean's tide across a vast plain
toward the mountains which never move.
marching in families, parents with children,
toddling babes and skeletal elders,
moving as one, row upon row,
column after column, endlessly,
toward the mountains which never move.
Larger groups, banding together
slogging along, nations and tribes,
bound by language and bound by sameness
of food and thought and dress,
toward the mountains which never move.
day upon day, year after year
through storm and heat
we make our way across the plain,
and as we slog along, we kill
spilling the blood of those beside us
because they are not the same as us
because of baubles we find along the way
we kill and we kill and we kill
and we march on killing wondering
if there might be peace beyond
the mountains which never move.

Seamus O' Brian

What Good Is A Poet

What good is a poet
when children are tortured,
sold as slaves to beasts
who foul their ivoried flesh,
plunder their innocence,
butcher the protests of decency.

What good is a poet
when blood cakes in the street
under a sun that beats
upon bloated corpses guilty
of impersonating humanity.

What good is a poet
when Justice is dead.

Seamus O' Brian

When Autumn Prowls

There at the eroding edge of summer
Autumn prowls
An unexpected chill
Hiding in the shadows
Of a twisted rooted elm.
A leaf jettisoned
Before I am ready
Pages of my calendar
Falling,
Leaves
Falling,
People whose breathing,
Living, being have
Intersected the meaning
Of my breathing, living,
Being
Are falling
Like pages
Like leaves
Like life
When autumn prowls

Seamus O' Brian

When Words Fail

when words fail
a cabal of stones
obsidian edged
gather in the mesh
of wire accusations.
Shifting their weight
recklessly
in a heart already weakened
by abrasions and
ragged lacerations.

what were you thinking?

why can't you see it?

why don't you answer me?

when words fail

eyes flicker to focus
on nothing at all
somewhere between
the drop of rain
crawling down the window
and eternity.

somewhere between
the wide loneliness of error
and the narrow puncture of admission

you're right

words moved
by a reluctant tongue
pushed out between
resisting lips
unrelated to

dissimilar to
the painful shapes
called thoughts
inside
somewhere between
the cease-fire and
the healing
where words fail

Seamus O' Brian

When You Think Of Me

what do you think of me
what projections of neural
pre-cognition, cognition,
re-cognition are driven
to the limbic system
of your mind, where disgust
or happiness or fear is birthed?
I sleep there in some neural net
of memory, I know, yet when I live again,
what do you feel? Am I a cut
on your finger, a demon in your
shadows, or—worse by far—am I
one of a thousand smeared handbills
fluttering their edges from an
alley in your mind? Am I anything
more to you than a wrinkle
in the backdrop of your living?
The silence of my unasked
question is a void much smaller
and so much safer than
the possibility of your
answer.

Seamus O' Brian

Where Are You?

i stare at words of marvelous comfort and
decide that my heart is not the comforting type
words of life and power, words that brought
a universe from nothing.
but sometimes i need arms
sometimes i need whispers of words
I have enough faith to look at everything
and believe that nothing I see is enough
to explain anything. To not see you,
but know you. To long, though,
like Thomas, to know the touch
of your scars against my fingers.
To hear, not read, the sound of
your voice forming the words
'Fear not' even as the same breath
formed the stars and made light
race forth from dark nothing.
instead, awareness of an unheard
voice rises in my soul as the faint
glow precedes the dawn. 'Go,

be my arms to the outcast,
and you will find me;
be my voice to the forgotten,
and you will find me;
be my heart to the unloved,
and, there, that is where
you will always find me.'

Seamus O' Brian

Where Day Unfolds

As a boy I often walked
Meadows brushed with summer's gold
Beneath the slanting sun I sought
The twilight fields where day unfolds.

Where autumn chested robin sways
On cattail clumps ascending spire;
Who unimpressed by human ways
Yet summons sunset's muted fire.

And scurrying, fervent footed mice
Beneath the brambled berry patch
With diligent scritch and urgent scratch
Pause, suddenly silent, as I pass by.

The night swift climbs the late day breeze
Staccato thrusts of wing and bone
Ascending arcs, Dadaelian's ease
Icarus falls with haunting moan.

Yet finds again his skyward arc
On wrenching wing, intrepid heart.
And I outstretched upon the grass
Alone observe his aerial act.

And watch the final fiery spears
Of sunset gild the meadow blades.
The burnished pink to grayness fades
As Aphrodite's star appears.

The tall pines lift their swaying boughs
To catch the final auburn shafts,
While twilight gathers herself below
The mouldering logs and tufts of grass.

And creeps along the rabbit trails
And through the brambled berry patch
To meet me on the dwindling path,
Paused, on the fading edge of day.

Hushed now, the robin and the lark,
As Venus lifts her wondrous light,
And I in the weight of the falling dark
Hear the night swift's fading cry.

I oft recall those twilight walks
And wish that I could find again
The meadows brushed with summer's gold
In the twilight fields where day unfolds.

Seamus O' Brian

Whisperer

What do you whisper, wind,
When you wander through the pines?
What traveler's tale do you spin
To fill their boughs with restless sighs?

Do you speak of salt-tinged memories,
Of wave-tossed ships and hurricanes;
Or do you hint at towering heights,
Of air born ships and eagle flights?

Do you tantalize the tethered trees
With tales of south pacific seas,
Of misty groves in distant lands
And ancient tombs in desert sands?

Beneath their lowing boughs I've lain
And listened to their mournful strains
And wondered if those restless trees
Have been provoked to jealousy.

If so then I would understand,
For I have heard its haunting song,
And though I've sought those distant lands,
The wind has always further gone.

Seamus O' Brian

Winter's Prophecy

With a crack of thunder, impales this summer afternoon
echoing insidiously the laughing voice of winter coming soon.
The brilliant spears of August's sun glance off the turning leaves
conceal the drafts of winter, sparkling icy shafts along the eaves;
traced along the greenward curl of a fern's unfolding curve
lurks the hoary breath of winter's death, restrained in chill reserve.
And in the strength of this right hand, within this frame of living breath
walks the prophet of my winter, the seeds of my own death.

Seamus O' Brian

Work In Progress

A poet begins
writing
poetry

poems pass
one by one
harvests torn
from the soul

unaware that
shaping, molding
over time

birthing, toiling
rummaging
through the mind

the poems
have shaped
the poet

i set out
to write poetry
but I have been

written.

Seamus O' Brian

Writer's Refuge

stress hunts, devours life
complex burdens of being
finding peace in words

Seamus O' Brian

You

you
a single word
you
but there is a someone on the other side
of that word,
that thought,
that perhaps
is the one soul among faceless billions
who ballasts my heart with the weight
of a battleship

you
sometimes my accountant
sometimes my neighbor
sometimes my mother
who left the door unlocked
with cookies on the table
made from borrowed eggs.
You.
such a versatile word.

you.
yes, you.
you, who knew
the door was unlocked
who put your foot
on my chest while I lay
on the floor and giggled
and you who thought
how simple it would be
to crush me with
a single push.

you.
you, whose departure
was a vacuum,
the vortex of my world

you.
a single thrust of my language,
and anonymous becomes object,
reader becomes complicit
you becomes me.

fiction becomes
memory.

Seamus O' Brian

You Can Never Go Home (A Senryu Collection)

a train's slow bellow
pushing through the city sounds
complains of loneliness

small town grips the highway,
to speeding travelers my world
a blink in the darkness

vacant lots were claimed
children playing ball in starlight
televisions were small

lightning chases rain
bikinis run for cover, crowded
under eaves, laughing

childhood's home address
exactly as it always was
back home in your heart

summer only needs
children and water, all else
is supercilious

softball field glowing
with laughter and halogen blaze
firefly shadows

yes, my mother's voice
still calls us home to dinner
in better memories

Seamus O' Brian

You Do Me No Harm

If the vanity of your heart
Drives your hand
To trouble the waters of my soul
So that you may hear the songs
Of a poet sung for you;
If the whispers of your lips
Are in the end only invitations
To the flattery upon which
your conceited heart feeds,
Do not fear,
You have done me no harm.
For you have only driven deeper
The pools of my heart,
You have only made greater
The depths of my passion,
You have only made sweeter
The rivers of my soul
For those who will come
Not to gaze at their own reflection
But to immerse themselves
In the song of humanity,
And drink from
The waters of poetry

Seamus O' Brian

You Gave Me Tomorrow

I don't remember if I hugged you
before I shoe-horned that old suitcase
(I'm sure that it was broken,
because I do remember twine)
into the trunk of your old Hornet
('73, I think, but shining
in a few new coats of paint
belying a transmission
that would bail this side of far enough)
and we set off rather pensively
with precisely rationed small talk
and a bin of tin-foiled sandwiches
enough of both to last until
we reached Miami where my future lay
wrapped up like a newspaper
on the porchstep of tomorrow.

I don't remember if you cried
I don't remember if I held your hand
As the miles of my childhood
Ticked away beneath that shiny hood,
But I could see the pain of raising me
The weight of raising all of us
On just this side of not enough
Chiseled in those lines beside your eyes,
That smile that could almost hide
a thousand empty, lonely nights,
(but not quite)
Concealed the grim, foreboding future
With no promises of something better
Than the banquet of our broken dreams
We gathered `round each day.
But those calloused hands,
Those chiseled eyes, those
Grim, determined smiles
With guts and prayers you
Pulled someday through all
The fissured cracks of everyday
Until your kids could stand,

Firm upon their own two feet
In gently used, thrift-store shoes
With tears that burned on hopeful cheeks
And say, 'It's o.k, Mom, I'll take it from here,
But I wouldn't be here, without you.'

I don't remember that I hugged you
When you pulled away and left me
On the front porch of tomorrow,
But I sure as hell remember
That I did, and always will, love you.

Seamus O' Brian

You Have No Idea

You have no idea- how could you?

Anger edging the sharpness of your words
Rising like a wind-driven tide to thrust you
and your knives against the seawall that once
was your father. Arrogant anger unrestrained
by unlived years, by unwalked roads, by uncarried
burdens.

You have no idea that fingers pointing, red face
raging, I still see a little boy who stood once upon
my knee to reach the fountain with lips poised, pursed.
You fling your arms upward, brandishing the swordplay
of your frustration as if heaven rent would endorse your claim.
Your eyes probe this wall, expecting a crack
that will reveal the triumph of your irrefutable logic,
blink away the fury that must follow my silence.

But you have no idea.

You have no idea that in my silence I do not see
the tear that now exists as only a trace across your cheek.
But I see a line of tears tracing back across the years
that I have tasted with my kisses. Countless tears rubbed
away with my fingers, buried in my shirt, lost in my shoulders.
And how I would erase each one
upon my knees if I could, and if I thought it would
make you- what? Better? Stronger?
Sometimes being a father is pantomime in the dark.

I know that many the night you lie awake
and the pain in your chest keeps asking you
how unfairness and stubbornness can pretend
to be love.

How antiquated blindness
could in self-deception assume
to be justice.

I hope that you have some idea
that for every night such pain
is your lullaby, I have spent

a hundred nights begging God
to teach me how to be your father.

I hope that you have some idea
That I know well the pain you feel.
That I have carried that same pain
within my chest, and that if I could-
I would carry yours too.
That I wish you would never hunger desperately
to be understood, that you would never
know the knifing ache of loving one
to whom your love is nothing.
That you will never stand on the threshold
of your world destroyed
and have no idea which way to turn.

But if and when you must stand
in the destruction of what you thought
your life was;
If you find yourself lost without the strength
to find your way home,
When you have done all you can in your own
strength, and it is not enough
Then I hope you know; then you **MUST** know
That you are not alone.

You stand upon, you are surrounded by
The prayers of a thousand restless nights.
Prayers whispered over your sleeping head
Resting soundlessly upon my chest.
Prayers that baptized your forehead with my tears
As I struggled with those things that are not yet.
Prayers breathed into the darkness
of your bedroom in those hours
when fathers walk the night.

Prayers prayed
while you had no idea.

Seamus O' Brian

Your Smile Still Does That

How can I hear you laugh
and not know
what it feels for a sun
to rise inside my soul?
How can I see your smile
and not have all the irksome
perversities of life evaporate?
How can I see you across the room
through the hand-gesturing crackers
and the wine glass exhortations,
see that mixture of rapt attention
and warmly bemused affection
and not remember when
you looked at me like that
and turned my world
upside down?
(The first time)
How can I remember when
I was me without you?
Before you and I
became us?
And why
(why)
would I want to?

Seamus O' Brian

Your Time Upon The Tower

Like the retreating tide-
That battle line of the ocean's mass
relinquishing its power in rippling eddies
and fingers of water grasping, scraping at the mud
as they are dragged back into blackness of the depths
where the blind fish hunt among the bones
of ships lost from the light of the sun
and from the thoughts of men,
And backward lapping waves reveal
The rise of glutinous mudbanks
The death smell of fish and crabs and muck.

So too retreats our poetry.
Our thoughts.
Our conviction.

I cast words and lines awkwardly across the
Last waves of an ocean filled with
Too many words and the babbling
Of too many fools. My words drift
Silently down, sinking particles of debris
Ignored by the mass of the ocean's surround.

The Remnants, though, they cast their lines
Gossamer threads, gold translucence of
Brilliance shimmering in the sinking sun
And their brilliance falls through the
unmoved ocean of useless words like the dung
of fish whose bowels cannot abide
such an abyss of ignorance.
And the mudbanks rise, and the stench of death
becomes comfortable, like home.

So too sinks our poetry.
Our thoughts.
Our conviction.

Ivory fingers push up through the cloying
Soil of a thousand philosophers' graves

Bones bleached eons white thrust their wordless
Accusations into faces paralyzed by amusement
And cry out, 'What will YOU do? ! ! '

Like the tide sucked down to the ocean's depths,
So the bones of great men dead
Are sucked from the ground by the vacuum
Of our indifference, our well-leisured apathy.
To demand from us the answer they dread.

You have been given a nation forged from
the stone and the timber and the steel
of a brutal wildness that would only yield
to the grim strength of hands hardened by
frost and pestilence and hunger.

A nation whose foundation was hammered
down by generations past upon
the bones of their children
and the graves of their dreams
and the conviction that seeds
of freedom sown in peril would yield
a harvest one day to come.

So they embraced the gaunt corpse of Hunger
and danced with Death, and stared in his eyes
all night for a morning that would not come.
these farmers, these soldiers, these slaves
who tore from the forest their homes,
and their crops from the stones. Who
yanked the steel from the ground to
stitch together with wagon wheels
and railroad ties a nation from land
unmapped, untamed, unknown.

And they wait for an answer
for what will you do
with the seeds they have planted
with the bones of their children.

For upon this foundation there rises a tower
built with the timbers of wisdom-

the genius of Persia and Greece,
The wisdom of Rome and the East.

A tower mortared by tireless inquiry
Of generations lost to the mists of time
Tempered by the fires of war
and guarded by the diligence of scribes.
A treasure of knowledge and wisdom gathered up
through blood and sweat and fire
and laid at your feet.

A tower of Babel ascending to the stars
a platform built to address God and His heavens
and the earth below.
The tower upon which you now stand,
with the eyes of heaven upon you,
with the eyes of all who have gone before,
with the eyes of a world crumbling around you,
waiting for your answer.

The generations around you are content
to accept this foundation, this blood-bought liberty,
this ocean of knowledge and with it become
the greatest producer and consumer of
amusement the ages have ever known.
To lie upon couches and clog their hearts
with the fat of the land before ever-enlarging
high definition televised drivel.

But, what about you? With the eyes of heaven
and earth upon you, with the eyes of the living
and the dead, I stand at the edge of this sea
and the shore beyond, and I ask you too,
As I see the edge of my own horizon-
as our poetry sinks,
and our minds,
and our conviction;
as the stench of our leisure and apathy rises
like the muck from an outgoing tide,

What about you, Reader?

What will you do with your time upon the tower?

Seamus O' Brian