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## Three Poems

Sean O'Brien

### THE WORKS

When I look up from reading, the back gate has vanished.  
In a skip in the lane stands a Christmas tree,  
bare and brown. This is July, in howling sunshine,  
a gale of light and dust when people are afraid  
and call it anger. Marcus and Willa have sized up the space  
and come tenderly bearing the new gate, a pale one  
that if it had arms would cover its modesty.  
They have a drill. The skip is fuming like a censer.  
In Sciascia's *The Council of Egypt*, Gilermo di Blasi  
is brought, after torture, out through the sunblind yard.  
His hair is white. His bare feet leak a greenish slime.  
He is assisted to a waiting coach, and then to death.  
On the final night, De Blasi turned to poetry  
'because he felt he could not, should not, write  
the true and profound things stirring within him.  
The concept of poetry then prevalent held  
that poetry is lies. This is no longer true,  
though poetry itself may have to disagree.'

When Willa pauses for a smoke, Marcus plays water  
over the flagstones. Now they gleam. The two men laugh.  
The rose has its sights on the trellis; the new arch  
anticipates jasmine. Summer is passing again.  
Gilermo di Blasi is dead and forgotten. Sciascia too  
is gone, but not the book I opened many years ago  
beside a fountain, sunstruck and baroque  
and half in shade - a property from fiction  
waiting for events to whisper evil from afar

or from a chamber just around that corner,  
where the executioners assured De Blasio  
that God hears every word including those of sparrows  
as they fall like smuts of ash to drift across the square  
and for a moment rise again on the impenitent sirocco.  
There is no fountain here, but I can see  
how water hangs like smoke above itself, then plunges  
through the shade to drench the ardent mermaids  
who are waiting, slick with life, or what resembles it.

### **BLACKTHORN BLOSSOM**

March wind and rain, the sea all storm, and yet  
Behind the dunes at Druridge Bay,  
Star-white blossom on the blackthorn bush,  
The Queen of Elfland's lingerie.

## **THE SHORTEST DAY**

Adrift in cloud, the moon  
expands its cataract:

in this late world, darkness  
is the rule. Remember

how when we were young  
the task was inescapable:

to get the proper names by heart,  
including all the goddesses

disposed of in the emptiness  
where light had been and gone

and kept on going? After that  
let strong despair usurp

a planetary chill, absolved  
from love and death, the better

to possess you. See,  
I've sat my life like Finals

set by monsters so the living  
cannot pass, and when today

I summon you I find  
you're further off than memory,

your mind elsewhere, the smile  
I saw as whimsical  
unearthly now. Star-garlanded  
for winter, Aphrodite sails

the frozen gulf of night, no more  
attentive to my blinded stare

than any of her sisters  
in the heavens care to be.