

Three Poems by Sean O'Brien

YOURS IN HASTE

What time do I call this? Time enough
to kill the suitors, hang the housemaids,
dig the faithful dog a hole (I didn't want to wake you)
and make ready to depart.

To each his own fidelity:
mine to water, yours to memory.
I am required at the far end of the world. So then
dear heart expect me when you see me
waiting in the fields of amaranth at last,
supposing nothing vital intervenes.

AMNESIA

It would seem a slow plague of amnesia had emptied the city.
On house-ends by the sidings, long-defunct concerns
delivered pale announcements in defence of haberdashery,
but those who for a lifetime had naturally ignored them
were nowhere to be seen. The railway station stood

aloof, an iron-pillared temple to a principle
left eerily intact but sealed against the understanding.
Entire districts where the poor had fought and lost
for generations out of mind could not be found at all.
The water in the docks from which a fortune had embarked

betrayed no sign of agitation, flawlessly reflecting
domes and offices and churches, whose entire *raison d'être*
must lie, we saw, in being rendered thus, to prove
that an unspoken reciprocity still underwrote
a guarantee as firm as handshakes at the Old Exchange

(which was, like so much else, not shown). What could we do
but take all this on trust, and having seen the city, leave again
and do our fretting somewhere else, some venue more aligned
with our absurd, belated purposes and, frankly, with our station as
the merely dead, who after all could have no business here?

The PRINCE OF AQUITANE

After Nerval

I am a shadow, the widower, the inconsolable,
the Prince of Aquitaine in his demolished tower.
My star is dead, my starry lute inlaid
with the black sun of melancholia.

In this entombing night, give me again
that comfort you once offered me: Tyrrhenian
Posillipo whose winding columbine
could ease my heart among the vines and roses.

Am I love? Am I Apollo? Lusignan or Biron?
My brow still blushes from the kisses of the Queen.
I've dreamed among the sea-caves with the Siren...

And I have forded Acheron both ways,
with my cithara tempered equally to serve
the cries of Sibyls and the saints in ecstasy.