

MARY O'BRIEN

XXI

Look the other way
I tell myself.
If remembrance pains
like metal bolt
on fractured bone
aching under thin skin
look the other way
grow old with grace
I tell myself;
pustules, warts
will fade, excised
by some act of patent self-deception
masked as wisdom.

Like, even now
I can remember
a day that was etched
by bold sun on clear water
while consciousness lurked lazily
in glazed shadows
recalled as perfection
and forget—
tho' it teeters on the vulnerable
rim of recall—
on that same day
I threw away
another chunk
of my small capital
of integrity.

Beat it, bastard thought
stay away
evocations corny
as the golden fields of guilt
harvested so assiduously

No use to look the other way
the cry that growing old
is an achievement
strikes the nadir of
prophetic optimism
with the deceptive plunk
of a small stone
in a hole,
very deep, very dark
very empty.

I can't kid myself
that dignity will somehow
compensate
for the hardening tunnels
of blood brewed
with damp ashes.

So what else is new?
For every Toscanini
every Noah
every Medicean grande dame
less credible
than Rip Van Winkle
there are a million eyes
where rheum
has chased out twinkles;
legions of sagging breasts
and skin forgotten
by suckling lips,
erectile tongues alike

In simple truth
I would rather
not
grow old.