

MICHAEL O'BRIEN

## A CALENDAR

1

Just before sleep the  
ear can almost make  
out in the slush  
of traffic a further  
speech, people saying ordinary  
things to each other,  
a kitchen music laid  
down like an arrow  
pointing always away.

2

Started with one busted  
strut, trashcan's violently-  
discarded umbrella-wreck.

3

An art of hesitation, of  
correction, of  
adjustment, of  
counted syllables,  
stubborn, full of doubt.

## THE NAMES

1

What can you say  
to the dead? You

tell them what they're  
missing, which is life,

and what you're missing,  
which is them.

2

*Nature Boy*,  
trombone, bass,

B'way-Lafayette station,  
evening, winter.

Where you been  
all this time?

## SONGS

1

Jean Cocteau playing drums  
in *Le Boeuf sur le Toit* “as  
if he were solving a  
complex mathematical equation”

2

the sound an old dog makes as she  
lays herself down on a wooden floor

3

stepping out from the chorus  
how lightly he  
holds the  
page he sings from

4

just once let the  
story go the other  
way the  
tree turn into a girl

5

with no wish to conclude  
he watches it happen

## STREETS

1

Moving fast, the eye  
works it out that  
they're a couple, he  
reaches out to  
touch her cheek, no,  
to take her cellphone.

2

From down the block  
hard to tell a  
spill of trash from  
a sleeping man  
until the eye,  
the quick, patient  
eye sorts it out,  
sorts it all out,  
the parts, the fit.

3

In streetlight the huge,  
deep-veined, heart-shaped  
leaves of the caladiums are  
ears, butterflies, ghosts.

## MORNINGS

Mornings the past comes back, a series of landslides.  
And the sun comes back. Awash in sleep  
you sought rest in the mineral dark where colors ripen.  
Now you watch air's breath cross pond like a hand on a horse.  
Happiness to have wandered into the future perfect,  
a place in the mind with a past of its own, a past that hasn't happened yet.  
Happiness of rain. Of tune's marrow in old song.  
A cloud the size of a small town drifts slowly eastward.  
Ferns begin the long descent into coal.  
Plants in the window: on the floor moonlight has printed their images.

## SEASONS

### The Trace

Barely touching, wind's  
rush across water

last year's furrow  
through corn stubble

fiddleheads erect in  
mouldering leaf-wrack

drystone wall  
supporting a road.

Hancock Poems: For Lenore

1

hearing early rain come up the fields, crescendo, diminuendo

2

Never stopping  
light rushes from  
the sun, eight  
minutes later  
finds this tree, your  
hand, everything.

3

now, suddenly, everywhere on pond's surface little zeroes of rain

4

Curious young goat  
lets me scratch behind  
his ears (they quicken  
with interest), his back's  
white centerline, his  
mailslot eyes keep watch.



## October

Froth trembles at pond's edge.  
Withered asters, a lost blue.  
An old hammock full of  
leaves. Milkweed pods on ash-  
grey stalks crack, spill white  
seed-stuff (winds will tug  
and tug, finally carry off).  
In three swoops bluejay settles  
on cherry's leafless branch. For  
a moment year's pendulum rests.

For Hildegard

1

Waterfall's  
froth of ice.

Birches whiter  
than quartz veins, the

hill has  
come down to

lay its head  
by the lake.

2

A gust detaches  
the snow from  
the branches it  
had come to  
rest on.

It  
drifts down, a  
cloud of particles  
almost lighter than  
the air they  
keep falling through.