

Tomas O'Leary

The Coffin Maker's Bargain

The coffin maker was aghast
That not a soul in years had passed
Away, though the old were old
Enough to die (fine health or not!)
While the new kept coming.

No dying meant no boxes,
Castoff bread and feeble gruel,
So he laid a plan whereby
He'd sell at half the price
To any shrewd soul who knew
His bum from a bargain.

Shrewd souls abounded,
For it was a thrifty village
Where every speck of being
Pronounced its worth on the scales,
And even laughter cost a dime.

A solid century now has passed:
The coffin maker still takes orders
For the forever aging, yes,
But also for ideas
Not embodied to be measured,
Generations yet to come
And a box that may suit them.

Everyone's buying --
So far into the future there isn't
A great great grandchild might one day be born
Whose coffin does not lie ready
In several speculative sizes.

Dear old Death only visits the village
To view all the handsome boxes at half price;
With a chuckle he leaves his card with the undying villagers,
Extreme thrift their fountain of youth.

As to the coffin maker, he oversees
The hammer and saw of his thousand descendents

And issues fine art through quality control,
Himself too busy not to be immortal.

Tomas O'Leary's third full-length collection of poetry, *A Prayer for Everyone* is just out from Ilora Press. Of the poems in this volume, X.J. Kennedy said, "I relished their verve, their cheerful strain of Irish blasphemy. And *Rhymer's Horoscope* is the best poem about poetry I've read in years." O'Leary's previous books are *Fool at the Funeral* and *The Devil Take a Crooked House*, both from Lynx House Press. O'Leary holds an MFA in poetry and an MA in expressive therapies and taught for years, and for years has worked with people who have Alzheimer's. He plays Irish accordion, sings on key, doodles artistically, and translates poetry from the Spanish.