

Doggerel written in

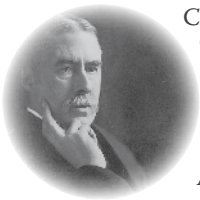
Poetry on death: A discursive review



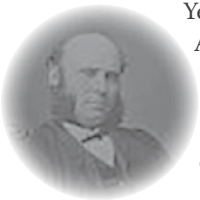
We all must leave this life someday—
A point made clear by Thomas Gray.
So, boasting neither pomp nor power,
I systematically devour,
Thoughts on death by poets past
For comfort ere I breathe my last.



The pessimistic Dylan Thomas
Perceived in death so little promise,
That we should merely rage and rage,
As it approaches while we age,
And bookish men should find it frightening,
Because our words have forked no lightning.



Consider that the Reaper's clock,
Took A.E. Housman's dying jock,
When he was at the height of fame,
And all the townsmen cheered his name.
It is not death we fear so much,
As anonymity's grim clutch.



Yet why should mortal dare be proud?
Abe Lincoln liked to quote out loud,
His favorite poem "Mortality,"
By William Knox—finality
For saint and sinner, fool and just,
Their bones all mingle in the dust.



An afterlife? Some say, "I know so."
Less sure was Milton's Penseroso,
Who thought and thought and thought about it,
Until he said, "I rather doubt it."
But thought again and wisely chose,
The simple truth: Nobody knows.



Apologies—my rhymes grow thinner.
Please come over soon for dinner.
We'll feast on loin of venison,
And for dessert, some Tennyson.
His joyous soul approached the bar,
And saw its Pilot from afar.

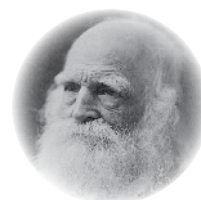
With that, I dare to eat a peach,
On Matthew Arnold's Dover Beach.
The Sea of Faith's withdrawing roar
He heard and pondered on the shore.
Let us be true to one another,
Treat thy stranger like a brother.



For those inclined to tempt the fates,
Let's hear from William Butler Yeats.
"No need for medics or repairman,"
Mused his pensive Irish airman,
"Seize the moment, feel the thrill,
For life goes on whate'er thou will."



Lest these thoughts seem too death
defiant,
Hearken William Cullen Bryant,
"If day to day your all you gave,
You'll go not like the quarry-slave."
The caravan is kind, it seems,
Just join the throng, and pleasant
dreams.



Before this doggerel makes you laugh,
Allow me, please, an epitaph.
At funerals we all take turns,
At mine, please quote from Robert
Burns:
Another world? "He rests in bliss."
If none? "He made the best of this."



Let optimism be your bias.
Your watchword, take from Tony Pius,
As he lay dying, ever stoic,
Spoke the emperor heroic—
Let us repeat it, all, en masse,
And boldly—"Aequanimitas."

the time of COVID-19

Go not ungrateful into that good night

(a villanelle, with apologies to Dylan Thomas)

Go not ungrateful into that good night.
Rejoice to be alive if but a day.
A lottery you won to see the light!

At least a million germ cells packed in tight,
Within your mother's ovaries once lay.
Go not ungrateful into that good night.

A random tadpole swam with all its might,
To join in double-stranded DNA.
A lottery you won to see the light!

Wise people know that birth is not a right,
But merely happenchance of genes at play.
Go not ungrateful into that good night.

And although death for most is fraught with fright,
It is the ticket each of us must pay.
A lottery we won to see the light!

Thus, you and I should ever be contrite,
And celebrate the life that came our way.
Go not ungrateful into that good night.
A lottery you won to see the light!

Like others,

I have found this sentiment

useful during end-of-life

conferences with family

members—namely, the miracle

may have already happened.

—Charles S. Bryan, MD, MACP, FRCP

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References

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3. To an Athlete Dying Young, 1896, A.E Housman (1859–1936).
4. Mortality, 1824, William Knox (1789–1825).
5. Il Penseroso, 1645/1646, John Milton (1608–1674).
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9. Thanatopsis, 1817, William Cullen Bryant (1794–1878).
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11. Do I dare to eat a peach? From The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, 1915, T.S Eliot (1888–1965).
12. Thought and thought and thought about it. From Miniver Cheevy, 1910, Edward Arlington Robinson (1869–1935).
13. Aequanimitas, 1889, William Osler (1849–1919).
14. Tony Pius: Antoninus Pius 86–161 CE, Roman emperor, who as he lay dying at his home in Lorium, Etruria, gave the watchword, Aequanimitas.