

Classic DEATH POEMS

The Frost of Death was on the Pane -- by Emily Dickinson

The Frost of Death was on the Pane --
"Secure your Flower" said he.
Like Sailors fighting with a Leak
We fought Mortality.

Our passive Flower we held to Sea --
To Mountain -- To the Sun --
Yet even on his Scarlet shelf
To crawl the Frost begun --

We pried him back
Ourselves we wedged
Himself and her between,
Yet easy as the narrow Snake
He forked his way along

Till all her helpless beauty bent
And then our wrath begun --
We hunted him to his Ravine
We chased him to his Den --

We hated Death and hated Life
And nowhere was to go --
Than Sea and continent there is
A larger -- it is Woe --

So give me back to Death -- by Emily Dickinson

So give me back to Death --
The Death I never feared
Except that it deprived of thee --
And now, by Life deprived,
In my own Grave I breathe
And estimate its size --
Its size is all that Hell can guess --
And all that Heaven was --

For Death -- or rather by Emily Dickinson

For Death -- or rather
For the Things 'twould buy --
This -- put away
Life's Opportunity --

The Things that Death will buy
Are Room --
Escape from Circumstances --
And a Name --

With Gifts of Life
How Death's Gifts may compare --
We know not --
For the Rates -- lie Here --

Said Death to Passion by Emily Dickinson

Said Death to Passion

"Give of thine an Acre unto me."

Said Passion, through contracting Breaths

"A Thousand Times Thee Nay."

Bore Death from Passion

All His East

He -- sovereign as the Sun

Resituated in the West

And the Debate was done.

Such, Such Is Death by Charles Sorley

Such, such is Death: no triumph: no defeat:

Only an empty pail, a slate rubbed clean,

A merciful putting away of what has been.

And this we know: Death is not Life, effete,
Life crushed, the broken pail. We who have seen
So marvellous things know well the end not yet.

Victor and vanquished are a-one in death:
Coward and brave: friend, foe. Ghosts do not say,
"Come, what was your record when you drew breath?"
But a big blot has hid each yesterday
So poor, so manifestly incomplete.
And your bright Promise, withered long and sped,
Is touched, stirs, rises, opens and grows sweet
And blossoms and is you, when you are dead.

On Death by Percy Bysshe Shelley

The pale, the cold, and the moony smile
Which the meteor beam of a starless night
Sheds on a lonely and sea-girt isle,
Ere the dawning of morn's undoubted light,
Is the flame of life so fickle and wan
That flits round our steps till their strength is gone.

O man! hold thee on in courage of soul
Through the stormy shades of thy wordly way,
And the billows of clouds that around thee roll
Shall sleep in the light of a wondrous day,
Where hell and heaven shall leave thee free
To the universe of destiny.

This world is the nurse of all we know,
This world is the mother of all we feel,
And the coming of death is a fearful blow
To a brain unencompass'd by nerves of steel:
When all that we know, or feel, or see,
Shall pass like an unreal mystery.

The secret things of the grave are there,
Where all but this frame must surely be,
Though the fine-wrought eye and the wondrous ear
No longer will live, to hear or to see
All that is great and all that is strange
In the boundless realm of unending change.

Who telleth a tale of unspeaking death?
Who lifteth the veil of what is to come?

Who painteth the shadows that are beneath
The wide-winding caves of the peopled tomb?
Or uniteth the hopes of what shall be
With the fears and the love for that which we see?

Death by James Henry Leigh Hunt

Death is a road our dearest friends have gone;
Why with such leaders, fear to say, "Lead on?"
Its gate repels, lest it too soon be tried,
But turns in balm on the immortal side.
Mothers have passed it: fathers, children; men
Whose like we look not to behold again;
Women that smiled away their loving breath;
Soft is the travelling on the road to death!
But guilt has passed it? men not fit to die?
O, hush -- for He that made us all is by!
Human we're all -- all men, all born of mothers;
All our own selves in the worn-out shape of others;
Our used, and oh, be sure, not to be ill-used brothers!

The Poet To Death by Sarojini Naidu

TARRY a while, O Death, I cannot die
While yet my sweet life burgeons with its spring;
Fair is my youth, and rich the echoing boughs
Where dhadikulas sing.

Tarry a while, O Death, I cannot die
With all my blossoming hopes unharvested,
My joys ungarnered, all my songs unsung,
And all my tears unshed.

Tarry a while, till I am satisfied
Of love and grief, of earth and altering sky;
Till all my human hungers are fulfilled,
O Death, I cannot die!

The Beauty of Death XIV by Khalil Gibran

Part One - The Calling

Let me sleep, for my soul is intoxicated with love and
Let me rest, for my spirit has had its bounty of days and nights;
Light the candles and burn the incense around my bed, and
Scatter leaves of jasmine and roses over my body;
Embalm my hair with frankincense and sprinkle my feet with perfume,
And read what the hand of Death has written on my forehead.

Let me rest in the arms of Slumber, for my open eyes are tired;
Let the silver-stringed lyre quiver and soothe my spirit;
Weave from the harp and lute a veil around my withering heart.

Sing of the past as you behold the dawn of hope in my eyes, for
It's magic meaning is a soft bed upon which my heart rests.

Dry your tears, my friends, and raise your heads as the flowers
Raise their crowns to greet the dawn.
Look at the bride of Death standing like a column of light
Between my bed and the infinite;
Hold your breath and listen with me to the beckoning rustle of
Her white wings.

Come close and bid me farewell; touch my eyes with smiling lips.
Let the children grasp my hands with soft and rosy fingers;
Let the ages place their veined hands upon my head and bless me;
Let the virgins come close and see the shadow of God in my eyes,
And hear the echo of His will racing with my breath.

Part Two - The Ascending

I have passed a mountain peak and my soul is soaring in the
Firmament of complete and unbound freedom;
I am far, far away, my companions, and the clouds are
Hiding the hills from my eyes.
The valleys are becoming flooded with an ocean of silence, and the
Hands of oblivion are engulfing the roads and the houses;
The prairies and fields are disappearing behind a white specter
That looks like the spring cloud, yellow as the candlelight
And red as the twilight.

The songs of the waves and the hymns of the streams
Are scattered, and the voices of the throngs reduced to silence;
And I can hear naught but the music of Eternity
In exact harmony with the spirit's desires.
I am cloaked in full whiteness;
I am in comfort; I am in peace.

Part Three - The Remains

Unwrap me from this white linen shroud and clothe me
With leaves of jasmine and lilies;
Take my body from the ivory casket and let it rest
Upon pillows of orange blossoms.
Lament me not, but sing songs of youth and joy;
Shed not tears upon me, but sing of harvest and the winepress;
Utter no sigh of agony, but draw upon my face with your
Finger the symbol of Love and Joy.
Disturb not the air's tranquility with chanting and requiems,
But let your hearts sing with me the song of Eternal Life;
Mourn me not with apparel of black,
But dress in color and rejoice with me;
Talk not of my departure with sighs in your hearts; close
Your eyes and you will see me with you forevermore.

Place me upon clusters of leaves and
Carry me upon your friendly shoulders and
Walk slowly to the deserted forest.
Take me not to the crowded burying ground lest my slumber
Be disrupted by the rattling of bones and skulls.
Carry me to the cypress woods and dig my grave where violets
And poppies grow not in the other's shadow;
Let my grave be deep so that the flood will not
Carry my bones to the open valley;
Let my grace be wide, so that the twilight shadows
Will come and sit by me.

Take from me all earthly raiment and place me deep in my
Mother Earth; and place me with care upon my mother's breast.
Cover me with soft earth, and let each handful be mixed
With seeds of jasmine, lilies and myrtle; and when they
Grow above me, and thrive on my body's element they will
Breathe the fragrance of my heart into space;
And reveal even to the sun the secret of my peace;
And sail with the breeze and comfort the wayfarer.

Leave me then, friends - leave me and depart on mute feet,
As the silence walks in the deserted valley;
Leave me to God and disperse yourselves slowly, as the almond
And apple blossoms disperse under the vibration of Nisan's breeze.
Go back to the joy of your dwellings and you will find there
That which Death cannot remove from you and me.
Leave with place, for what you see here is far away in meaning
From the earthly world. Leave me.

It Was Not Death

It was not death, for I stood up,
And all the dead lie down.
It was not night, for all the bells
Put out their tongues for noon.

It was not frost, for on my flesh
I felt siroccos crawl,
Nor fire, for just my marble feet
Could keep a chancel cool.

And yet it tasted like them all,
The figures I have seen
Set orderly for burial
Reminded me of mine,

As if my life were shaven
And fitted to a frame
And could not breathe without a key,
And 'twas like midnight, some,

When everything that ticked has stopped
And space stares all around,
Or grisly frosts, first autumn morns,
Repeal the beating ground;

But most like chaos, stopless, cool,
Without a chance, or spar,
Or even a report of land
To justify despair.

Because I Could Not Stop For Death

Because I could not stop for Death,
He kindly stopped for me;
The carriage held but just ourselves
And Immortality.

We slowly drove, he knew no haste,
And I had put away
My labour, and my leisure too,
For his civility.

We passed the school where children played,
Their lessons scarcely done;
We passed the fields of gazing grain,
We passed the setting sun.

We paused before a house that seemed
A swelling of the ground;
The roof was scarcely visible,
The cornice but a mound.

Since then 'tis centuries; but each
Feels shorter than the day
I first surmised the horses' heads
Were toward eternity.

On Death

Then Almitra spoke, saying, "We would ask now of Death."

And he said: You would know the secret of death.

But how shall you find it unless you seek it in the heart of life?

The owl whose night-bound eyes are blind unto the day cannot unveil the mystery of light.

If you would indeed behold the spirit of death, open your heart wide unto the body of life.

For life and death are one, even as the river and the sea are one.

In the depth of your hopes and desires lies your silent knowledge of the beyond;

And like seeds dreaming beneath the snow your heart dreams of spring.

Trust the dreams, for in them is hidden the gate to eternity.

Your fear of death is but the trembling of the shepherd when he stands before the king whose hand is to be laid upon him in honour.

Is the shepherd not joyful beneath his trembling, that he shall wear the mark of the king?

Yet is he not more mindful of his trembling?

For what is it to die but to stand naked in the wind and to melt into the sun?

And what is to cease breathing, but to free the breath from its restless tides, that it may rise and expand and seek God unencumbered?

Only when you drink from the river of silence shall you indeed sing.

And when you have reached the mountain top, then you shall begin to climb.

And when the earth shall claim your limbs, then shall you truly dance.

Dying

I heard a fly buzz when I died;

The stillness round my form

Was like the stillness in the air

Between the heavens of storm.

The eyes beside had wrung them dry,

And breaths were gathering sure

For that last onset, when the king

Be witnessed in his power.

I willed my keepsakes, signed away

What portion of me I

Could make assignable,-and then

There interposed a fly,

With blue, uncertain, stumbling buzz,

Between the light and me;

And then the windows failed, and then
I could not see to see.

Elegy before Death

Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892–1950)

THERE will be rose and rhododendron
When you are dead and underground;
Still will be heard from white Syringas
Heavy with bees, a sunny sound;

Still will the tamaracks be raining. 5
After the rain has ceased, and still
Will there be robins in the stubble,
Brown sheep upon the warm, green hill.

Spring will not all, nor autumn falter, 10
Nothing will know that you are gone,
Saving alone some sullen plowland
None but yourself sets foot upon;

Saving the mayweed and the pigweed
Nothing will know that you are dead— 15
These, and perhaps a useless wagon
Standing beside some tumbled shed.

Oh, there will pass with your great passing
Little of beauty not your own;
Only the light from common water,
Only the grace from simple stone...

BIRCHES

Robert Frost

When I see birches bend to left and right
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,
I like to think some boy's been swinging them.
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay.
Ice-storms do that. Often you must have seen them
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning
After a rain. They click upon themselves
As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust--

Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.
They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load,
And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed
So low for long, they never right themselves:
You may see their trunks arching in the woods
Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground
Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair
Before them over their heads to dry in the sun.
But I was going to say when Truth broke in
With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm
(Now am I free to be poetical?)
I should prefer to have some boy bend them
As he went out and in to fetch the cows--
Some boy too far from town to learn baseball,
Whose only play was what he found himself,
Summer or winter, and could play alone.
One by one he subdued his father's trees
By riding them down over and over again
Until he took the stiffness out of them,
And not one but hung limp, not one was left
For him to conquer. He learned all there was
To learn about not launching out too soon
And so not carrying the tree away
Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise
To the top branches, climbing carefully
With the same pains you use to fill a cup
Up to the brim, and even above the brim.
Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish,
Kicking his way down through the air to the ground.
So was I once myself a swinger of birches.

And so I dream of going back to be.
It's when I'm weary of considerations,
And life is too much like a pathless wood
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping
From a twig's having lashed across it open.
I'd like to get away from earth awhile
And then come back to it and begin over.

May no fate willfully misunderstand me
And half grant what I wish and snatch me away
Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:
I don't know where it's likely to go better.

I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree,
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,
But dipped its top and set me down again.
That would be good both going and coming back.
One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.

Now When the Number of My Years by Robert Louis Stevenson(1850 – 1894)

Now when the number of my years
Is all fulfilled, and I
From sedentary life
Shall rouse me up to die,
Bury me low and let me lie
Under the wide and starry sky.
Joying to live, I joyed to die,
Bury me low and let me lie.

Clear was my soul, my deeds were free,
Honour was called my name,
I fell not back from fear
Nor followed after fame.
Bury me low and let me lie
Under the wide and starry sky.
Joying to live, I joyed to die,
Bury me low and let me lie.

Bury me low in valleys green
And where the milder breeze
Blows fresh along the stream,
Sings roundly in the trees -
Bury me low and let me lie
Under the wide and starry sky.
Joying to live, I joyed to die,
Bury me low and let me lie.

Death - a poem by by William Butler Yeats



Nor dread nor hope attend
A dying animal;
A man awaits his end
Dreading and hoping all;
Many times he died,
Many times rose again.
A great man in his pride
Confronting murderous men
Casts derision upon
Supersession of breath;
He knows death to the bone
Man has created death.

No man is an island,
Entire of itself.
Each is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.
As well as if a promontory were.
As well as if a manor of thine own
Or of thine friend's were.
Each man's death diminishes me,
For I am involved in mankind.
Therefore, send not to know
For whom the bell tolls,
It tolls for thee. (John Donne)

To One Shortly To Die

From all the rest I single out you, having a message for you,
You are to die... let others tell you what they please, I cannot prevaricate,
I am exact and merciless, but I love you... there is no escape for you.

Softly I lay my right hand upon you, you just feel it,
I do not argue, I bend my head close and half envelop it,
I sit quietly by, I remain faithful,
I am more than nurse, more than parent or neighbor,
I absolve you from all except yourself spiritual bodily,

that is eternal, you yourself will surely escape,
The corpse you will leave will be but excrementitious.

The sun burst through in unlooked for directions,
Strong thoughts fill you and confidence, you smile,
You forget you are sick, as I forget you are sick,
You do not see the medicines, you do not mind the weeping friends,
I am with you,
I exclude others from you, there is nothing to be commiserated,
I do not commiserate, I congratulate you.

Walt Whitman
(1819-1892)

Do not stand at my grave and weep,
I am not there; I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow,
I am the diamond glints on snow,
I am the sun on ripened grain,
I am the gentle autumn rain.
When you awaken in the morning's hush
I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circling flight.
I am the soft starlight at night.
Do not stand at my grave and cry,
I am not there; I did not die.