

# Varieties of Death

## **Reflections on death**

### **Peter Pan...**

*To die will be an awfully big adventure.*

### **from Chapter 10 of Gulliver's Travels by Jonathan Swift**

...he observed long life to be the universal desire and wish of mankind. That whoever had one foot in the grave was sure to hold back the other as strongly as he could. That the oldest had still hopes of living one day longer, and looked on death as the greatest evil, from which nature always prompted him to retreat. ...he observed that every man desired to put off death some time longer, let it approach ever so late: and he rarely heard of any man who died willingly, except he were incited by the extremity of grief or torture.

### **Bertrand Russell...**

*The great use of a life is to spend it for something that outlasts it,*

### **George Santayana...**

*There is no cure for birth and death save to enjoy the interval.*

### **Woody Allen...**

*I don't want to gain immortality through my work living on after me - I want to gain it by not dying.*

### **From the film Blade Runner (director Ridley Scott)...**

*It's too bad she won't live.  
But then again, who does?*

### **Archbishop Desmond Tutu...**

*When you have a potentially terminal disease, it concentrates the mind*

*wonderfully. It gives a new intensity to life. You discover how many things you have taken for granted - the love of your spouse, the Beethoven symphony, the dew on the rose, the laughter on the face of your grandchild*

### **Jacques-Benigne Winslow, Danish Anatomist: Morte Incertae Signa, 1740**

*Death is certain, since it is inevitable, but also uncertain, since its diagnosis is sometimes fallible*

### **Anon...**

*Those afraid of death are usually afraid of life.*

*Death and taxes are the only certainties in life.*

### **John Maynard Keynes...**

*In the long run we are all dead.*

### **Spanish proverb...**

*Quien teme la muerte no goza la vida.  
(He who fears death cannot enjoy life)*

### **Mark Twain...**

*Let us endeavor so to live that when we come to die even the undertaker will be sorry.*

### **Joe E. Lewis...**

*You only live once, but if you work it right, once is enough.*

### **Friedrich Nietzsche...**

*One must die proudly when it is no longer possible to live proudly.*

### **Ludwig Wittgenstein...**

Death is not an event in life: we do not live to experience death. If we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present.

### **Jack London...**

*The proper function of man is to live, not to exist. I shall not waste my days in trying to prolong them. I shall USE my time.*

### **Final words on death**

#### **Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, d.1170...**

*I am ready to die for my Lord, that in my blood the Church may obtain liberty and peace.*

#### **Ludwig van Beethoven, composer, d.1827...**

*Friends applaud, the comedy is finished.*

#### **Lord George Byron, writer, d. 1824...**

*Now I shall go to sleep. Goodnight.*

#### **Winston Churchill, d.1965...**

*I'm bored with it all.*  
(Before slipping into a coma. He died 9 days later.)

#### **Richard Feynman, physicist, d.1988...**

*I'd hate to die twice. It's so boring.*

#### **Errol Flynn, actor, d.1959**

*I've had a hell of a lot of fun and I've enjoyed every minute of it.*

#### **Louis B. Mayer, film producer, 1957**

*Nothing matters. Nothing matters.*

### **Karl Marx, d.1883**

*Go on, get out - last words are for fools who haven't said enough.*  
(To his housekeeper, who urged him to tell her his last words so she could write them down for posterity).

### **Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, d.1762**

*It's all been very interesting.*

### **Pietro Perugino, Italian painter, d.1523**

*I am curious to see what happens in the next world to one who dies unshriven.*  
(Giving his reasons for refusing to see a priest as he lay dying).

### **General John Sedgwick, Union Commander, d.1864**

*They couldn't hit an elephant at this dist...*  
(Killed in battle during US Civil War).

### **Dylan Thomas, poet, d. 1953...**

*I've had eighteen straight whiskies, I think that's the record*

### **Vespasian, Roman Emperor, d.79 AD**

*Woe is me. Me thinks I'm turning into a god.*

### **Leonardo da Vinci, artist, d.1519**

*I have offended God and mankind because my work did not reach the quality it should have.*

### **George Washington, d.1799**

*I die hard but am not afraid to go.*

### **Oscar Wilde, writer, d.1900**

*Either that wallpaper goes, or I do.*

## Verse on Death

### The Sin of Being by Sidney Carter

What trouble maker  
sent us all  
into this giddy,  
death-defying Fall

out of the dark  
into the light?  
Who dared to break  
the peace of night?

Oblivion  
keeps pulling me  
towards the paradise  
of not to be

but still I  
disobey the call:  
the sin of being is  
Original

### Requiem by Robert Louis Stevenson

Under the wide and starry sky  
Dig the grave and let me lie.  
Glad did I live and gladly die,  
And I laid me down with a will.

This be the verse you grave for me;  
Here he lies where he longed to be,  
Home is the sailor, home from sea,  
And the hunter home from the hill.

### Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night - Dylan Thomas

Do not go gently into that good night.  
Old age should burn and rage at the close of day.  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,  
Because their words had forked no lightning they  
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright  
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,  
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,  
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight  
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,  
Curse, bless me now with your fierce tears, I pray.  
Do not go gentle into that good night.  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

### And Death Shall Have No Domain - Dylan Thomas

And death shall have no dominion.  
Dead men naked they shall be one  
With the man in the wind and the west moon;  
When their bones are picked clean and the clean  
bones gone,  
They shall have stars at elbow and foot;  
Though they go mad they shall be sane,  
Though they sink through the sea they shall rise  
again;  
Though lovers be lost love shall not;  
And death shall have no dominion.

And death shall have no dominion.  
Under the windings of the sea  
They lying long shall not die windily;  
Twisting on racks when sinews give way,  
Strapped to a wheel, yet they shall not break;  
Faith in their hands shall snap in two,  
And the unicorn evils run them through;  
Split all ends up they shan't crack;  
And death shall have no dominion.

And death shall have no dominion.  
No more may gulls cry at their ears  
Or waves break loud on the seashores;  
Where blew a flower may a flower no more  
Lift its head to the blows of the rain;  
Through they be mad and dead as nails,  
Heads of the characters hammer through daisies;  
Break in the sun till the sun breaks down,  
And death shall have no dominion.

### A Zen haiku...

While alive be a dead man,  
thoroughly dead,  
and act as you will  
and all is good.

### Epitaphs

Here lies an atheist  
All dressed up,  
And no place to go

*Pause, stranger, when you pass me by,  
For as you are, so once was I.  
As I am now, so will you be.  
Then prepare unto death, and follow me*