



---

A COMPANION ANTHOLOGY OF MODERN MOURNING

# GREAT PERORATIONS

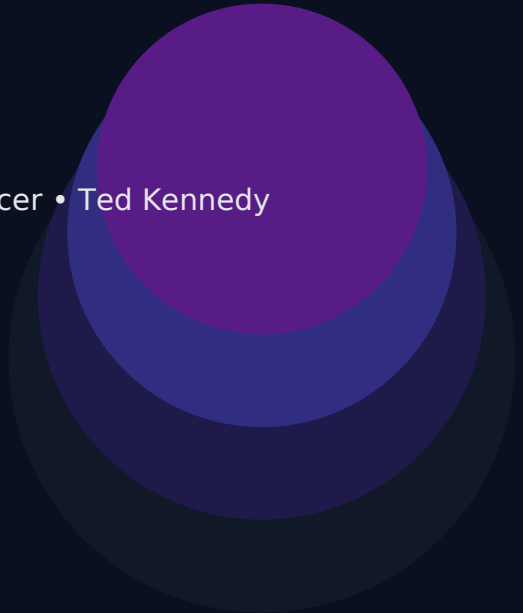
## Modern Companion

A curated companion volume of modern funeral speeches, elegies, and public words of mourning.

Short quotation-fragments, close reading, and context for the later texts that still feel electrically alive.

What this book does	What it avoids
Modern pieces only; more excerpt-fragments; rhetorical explanation and historical framing.	No full reproductions of still-copyrighted texts; quotations kept deliberately short.

Auden • Thomas • Nehru • Robert F. Kennedy • Earl Spencer • Ted Kennedy



# Contents

A chapter begins on the page shown below. Page numbers appear in the footer throughout.

W. H. Auden — Funeral Blues	3
W. H. Auden — In Memory of W. B. Yeats	5
Dylan Thomas — A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London	7
Jawaharlal Nehru — On the Death of Gandhi	8
Robert F. Kennedy — Remarks on the Assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.	9
Earl Spencer — Eulogy for Diana, Princess of Wales	11
Ted Kennedy — Eulogy for Robert F. Kennedy	13

Editorial note: the quoted words in this volume are intentionally brief. The point is not to replace the originals, but to sharpen your ear for how these modern texts work.

# W. H. Auden — Funeral Blues

1936/1938 • modern elegy / funeral speech

Originally written as a satiric cabaret piece, later reshaped into one of the most intimate modern poems of grief in English. The speaker tries to make private sorrow govern the whole visible world.

## Quoted fragments and what they are doing

<b>“Stop all the clocks”</b>	Grief begins as a command. Time itself feels indecent when the beloved is gone.
<b>“cut off the telephone”</b>	The world’s ordinary circuits of talk and business must be interrupted.
<b>“prevent the dog”</b>	Even comic domestic detail becomes part of ceremonial mourning.
<b>“Bring out the coffin”</b>	The poem moves from annoyance to ritual; private pain becomes public procession.
<b>“let the mourners come”</b>	Grief wants witnesses. Sorrow becomes theatrical without becoming false.
<b>“He was my North”</b>	The dead beloved was not an ornament but an orientation system.
<b>“my South, my East”</b>	The line expands personal attachment into geography.
<b>“my working week”</b>	Love organized both duty and leisure; it shaped time’s texture.
<b>“my Sunday rest”</b>	The lost person governed not just passion, but repose.

<b>“I thought that love”</b>	The poem pivots from confidence to disillusion.
<b>“would last for ever”</b>	The childlike hope is stated plainly, which makes it brutal.
<b>“I was wrong”</b>	One of the starkest monosyllabic endings in lyric grief.

Quotation policy note: total quoted words here are kept short and fragmentary (44 quoted words), with the interpretive weight carried by commentary rather than reproduction.

# W. H. Auden — In Memory of W. B. Yeats

1939 • modern elegy / funeral speech

Written at Yeats's death, the poem is both elegy and meditation on poetry's strange survival. It is about what a poet can and cannot do once history turns violent.

## Quoted fragments and what they are doing

<b>“He disappeared”</b>	Death is described with shocking administrative flatness.
<b>“in the dead of winter”</b>	The season externalizes emotional and civilizational chill.
<b>“brooks were frozen”</b>	Nature mirrors interruption; flow has stopped.
<b>“airports almost deserted”</b>	Modern infrastructure enters elegy, making it unmistakably twentieth-century.
<b>“The words of a dead man”</b>	Auden shifts from body to language: what remains is verbal life.
<b>“Are modified”</b>	Poems survive by being re-read under new pressure.
<b>“in the guts of the living”</b>	Reception is bodily, not abstract; literature is metabolized.
<b>“poetry makes nothing happen”</b>	The famous provocation lowers literature's political vanity.
<b>“it survives”</b>	Yet poetry endures precisely by not behaving like legislation.

<b>“a way of happening”</b>	Poetry is not direct action; it alters forms of feeling.
<b>“a mouth”</b>	Art gives speech back to those history has muted.

Quotation policy note: total quoted words here are kept short and fragmentary (39 quoted words), with the interpretive weight carried by commentary rather than reproduction.

# Dylan Thomas – A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London

1945 • modern elegy / funeral speech

Thomas refuses the easy consolation of public tragedy. The poem insists that any language adequate to such a death must resist sentimentality and patriotic prettification.

## Quoted fragments and what they are doing

<b>“Never until the mankind”</b>	The opening vaults immediately from one child to species-scale seriousness.
<b>“making bird beast and flower”</b>	Creation language enlarges the moral frame.
<b>“I must enter again”</b>	Speech is treated as a threshold one should not cross too lightly.
<b>“the first, spinning place”</b>	The child’s death is set inside primordial creation, not newspaper rhetoric.
<b>“After the first death”</b>	The line feels theological: singular death opens an abyss.
<b>“there is no other”</b>	No second explanation can domesticate the first blow.
<b>“the majesty and burning”</b>	The poem acknowledges grandeur without romanticizing the fire.
<b>“of the child’s death”</b>	Thomas forces the phrase to remain grave, not picturesque.

Quotation policy note: total quoted words here are kept short and fragmentary (33 quoted words), with the interpretive weight carried by commentary rather than reproduction.

# Jawaharlal Nehru – On the Death of Gandhi

1948 • modern elegy / funeral speech

Broadcast after Gandhi's assassination, Nehru's address fuses personal grief with national shock. It is remembered for compressing a civilizational loss into speech of almost impossible clarity.

## Quoted fragments and what they are doing

<b>"The light has gone out"</b>	A whole public life is translated into one image: illumination withdrawn.
<b>"of our lives"</b>	Nehru makes the loss collective; the pronoun does the political work.
<b>"and there is darkness"</b>	The sentence risks simplicity and wins because the moment demanded it.
<b>"everywhere"</b>	Grief is rendered total, not local.
<b>"I was wrong"</b>	Nehru famously corrects himself; mourning and judgment happen in real time.
<b>"for the light"</b>	The metaphor is rescued from melodrama by clarification.
<b>"that shone in this country"</b>	The dead leader becomes a national radiance, not just a private memory.
<b>"will illumine this country"</b>	The future tense turns eulogy into civic obligation.
<b>"for many more years"</b>	Duration becomes an ethical demand on the living.

Quotation policy note: total quoted words here are kept short and fragmentary (32 quoted words), with the interpretive weight carried by commentary rather than reproduction.

# Robert F. Kennedy — Remarks on the Assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

1968 • modern elegy / funeral speech

Delivered extemporaneously in Indianapolis on the night of King’s murder. Kennedy chose consolation over incitement, addressing a crowd that had not yet heard the news and might easily have erupted.

## Quoted fragments and what they are doing

<b>“For those of you”</b>	He begins by narrowing the address to human listeners, not abstractions.
<b>“who are black”</b>	Kennedy names the wound directly rather than speaking in euphemism.
<b>“and are tempted”</b>	He acknowledges the emotional logic of rage before redirecting it.
<b>“to be filled with hatred”</b>	The line risks the crowd’s anger instead of tiptoeing around it.
<b>“I had a member”</b>	His personal disclosure gives credibility to his appeal.
<b>“of my family killed”</b>	Private bereavement becomes a bridge, not a detour.
<b>“we can move”</b>	The speech turns from shock to collective agency.
<b>“in that direction”</b>	He gestures toward vengeance only to reject it.
<b>“as Martin Luther King did”</b>	King is invoked as example, not slogan.

**“with love and  
wisdom”**

The resolution is ethical and practical at once.

Quotation policy note: total quoted words here are kept short and fragmentary (38 quoted words), with the interpretive weight carried by commentary rather than reproduction.

# Earl Spencer — Eulogy for Diana, Princess of Wales

1997 • modern elegy / funeral speech

Delivered at Westminster Abbey, the speech is remembered both as a brother's tribute and as a rebuke to the institutions that consumed Diana. It changed the emotional weather of the funeral.

## Quoted fragments and what they are doing

<b>“the very essence of compassion”</b>	Spencer defines Diana by a moral energy, not by protocol.
<b>“of duty”</b>	He pointedly separates true service from ceremonial obligation.
<b>“of style, of beauty”</b>	The cadence acknowledges glamour without reducing her to it.
<b>“all over the world”</b>	Her image is globalized; monarchy becomes media-age myth.
<b>“I pledge that we”</b>	The eulogy becomes vow, which raises its emotional stakes.
<b>“your blood family”</b>	This phrase draws a line against the institution around her.
<b>“will do all we can”</b>	Promise replaces ornament.
<b>“to continue the imaginative way”</b>	Diana's legacy is framed as method, not monument.
<b>“in which you were steering”</b>	She is remembered as active, not merely adored.

**“through the  
years ahead”**

The future is recruited into mourning.

Quotation policy note: total quoted words here are kept short and fragmentary (41 quoted words), with the interpretive weight carried by commentary rather than reproduction.

# Ted Kennedy – Eulogy for Robert F. Kennedy

1968 • modern elegy / funeral speech

At St. Patrick’s Cathedral, Ted Kennedy transformed his brother from fallen candidate into moral exemplar. The close is among the most memorable endings in American funeral speech.

## Quoted fragments and what they are doing

<b>“My brother need not”</b>	The opening rejects sanctification even while performing it.
<b>“be idealized”</b>	Ted claims realism, which paradoxically increases trust.
<b>“or enlarged in death”</b>	A fine phrase: grief resists inflation and thereby achieves it.
<b>“as a good and decent man”</b>	The moral scale is human, not imperial.
<b>“who saw wrong”</b>	The sentence turns immediately to ethical perception.
<b>“and tried to right it”</b>	Action matters more than sentiment.
<b>“saw suffering”</b>	The structure is biblical in its repetition.
<b>“and tried to heal it”</b>	Political life is recast as practical mercy.
<b>“Some men see things”</b>	The famous close broadens from biography to aspiration.
<b>“and ask why”</b>	Skepticism is granted its sentence.

<b>“I dream things”</b>	The voice tilts toward prophecy.
<b>“that never were”</b>	Imagination becomes a political faculty.
<b>“and ask why not”</b>	The ending snaps shut like a challenge to the living.

Quotation policy note: total quoted words here are kept short and fragmentary (48 quoted words), with the interpretive weight carried by commentary rather than reproduction.