

The Ballad of the Gray Brigade, or The Reaper Is Unduly Feared

(Ballad)

The Reaper is unduly feared,
And Time its tricks will play.
I combed through my unruly beard
And found a gray today.

Alarms and laughter drift right through
These far-from-soundproof walls.
No isolation can survive
These dormitory halls.

The Reaper is unduly feared
By those who know their fate,
But what will come of those who've veered
And lost the path that's straight?

I stroked my salt-and-pepper beard—
A field of black and gray.
Dear God, empow'r my deeds, so I'll

Yield fruit on Judgment Day.

The Reaper cannot long be dodged,

That temporary theft.

Each person must outrun its dogs,

Named Loneliness and Death.

I keep my hands preoccupied.

‘Cause work keeps fear at bay.

I rummaged through my silver beard

And found three blacks today.

The Reaper is unduly feared.

Each gravestone is its throne,

But I feel safe inside this house

That’s mine and mine

Alone.