

The Reversal

Billy Collins

It's so beautiful outside today
and we're all going to die,
especially me,

is an observation that drenches
the pages of every anthology of poetry.

The trees are brilliant in crimson,
and I am one day nearer the grave
would be one way to put it.

Red and white tulips are swaying
in a mild breeze this morning,
and just look at the dark gullies under my eyes
would be another.

So many variations,
you have to wonder how would it be
if the picture were flipped the other way

and poets never tired of declaring
in poem after poem
that the world is a mound of ashes
and that they will never die.

How crummy the flowers look!
How well I feel!
How hideous the mountain range!
How handsome I will always be!
How fine to live forever in the midst
Of such relentless and unspeakable ugliness!

Which brings us to the question:
how much more of that would you have to hear
before you longed for
a bead of dew on the tulip
and that cough that will be your undoing?