

Consumed

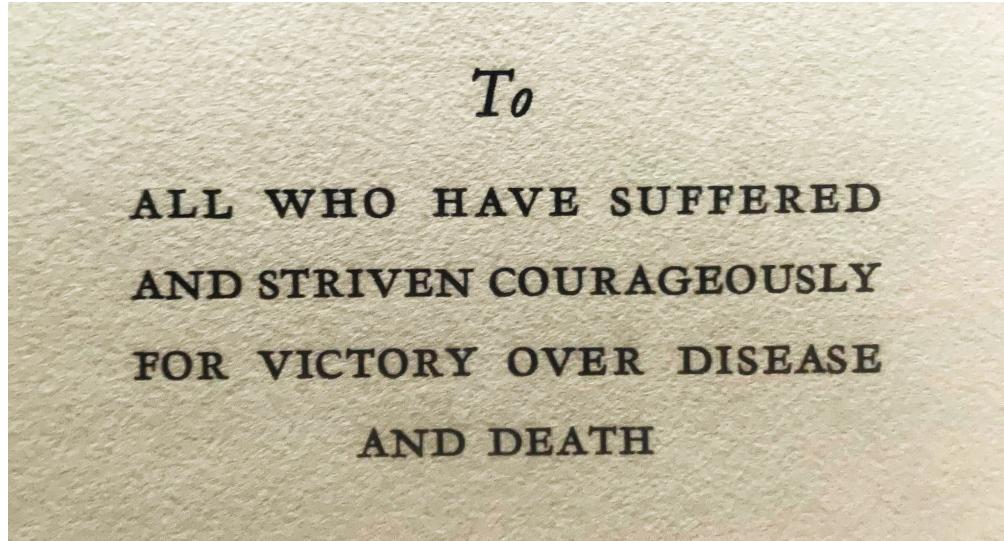
An Epistolary Poetry Collection

By Rowan Tackitt

What follows is the story of a woman named [REDACTED] [REDACTED] who was diagnosed with pulmonary tuberculosis—also known as consumption or phthisis—at only [REDACTED] years old.

After some time at [REDACTED] Sanitarium, she returned home more beautiful than ever.

Upon her death, the ashes of her heart became medicine for those who fell ill in her wake.



Lewis Moorman, *Tuberculosis and Genius*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940).

PREFACE

There's a [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] cure for tragedy. It is called [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] your heart [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]¹

Pulmonary Tuberculosis.

Its prevalence in the United States.

Decennial years.	Population.	Deaths from Pul. Tub.	Per 1000 Pop.	References.
				Mortality.
1850	23191000	33516	1.45	
1860	31443000	49082	1.56	
1870	38558000	68896	1.79	
1880	50156000	91551	1.82	
1890	62622000	102199	1.63	
Average for the 5 decennial years, 1.65. Increase of 12 per cent.				

Wells, Edward Franklin, Pulmonary Tuberculosis, Crerar Ms 102, Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

¹ Kate Bowler, *Everything Happens for a Reason; and Other Lies I've Loved*, (New York: Random House, 2018), xi.

Synopsis

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] tuberculosis, wildly contagious

and incurable, [REDACTED] wormed its way into her lungs and devoured her life. [REDACTED] She had been [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] the first [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] so

her parents packed her things in a trunk and sent her away to a [REDACTED] sanitarium [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] she was shuttered, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] in the bloom of youth, watching from [REDACTED] windows as her life withered away. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] She [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] cut [REDACTED] deep into the tissues of her lungs to [REDACTED] carve out the infection. [REDACTED] she [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] would make [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] war, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] her world wouldn't end in a locked [REDACTED]

room. [REDACTED]²

SYMPTOMS.—Much difference of opinion has always prevailed as to whether there is a true *tubercular diathesis*, indicated by any characteristic signs. Many persons become tuberculous who present no evident peculiarities, but the following characters are looked upon as showing a tendency to the disease in children and young persons. They are tall, slim, erect, and delicate-looking, with scarcely any fat; and have usually a pretty oval face, a clear complexion, bright eyes, and large pupils. The skin is very thin, soft and delicate, and through it blueish veins are seen; the hair is fine and silky, often light, the eyelashes being long. They cut their teeth early, and are generally precocious and clever, walking and talking soon. They are excitable and active in body and mind. The ends of the bones are very small and firm, the shafts also being thin and rigid, while the cartilages seem very soft and flexible. The thorax is small, being either long and narrow, or flattened.

Frederick Roberts, *Theory And Practice Of Medicine*, (London: H. K. Lewis, 1880), 438.

² Kate Bowler, *Everything Happens for a Reason*, 145-146.

Certainty

[REDACTED] I am tired most of the time, but I feel driven

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] to say something about dying [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] grief [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I have been infected by the
urgency of death. [REDACTED]³

³ Kate Bowler, *Everything Happens for a Reason*, (New York: Random House, 2018), 106.

veyed. There is here an unintentional dishonesty that is as bad as though in the hope of doing the patient good the doctor has flatly said, "you have no heart disease". The same is true of tuberculosis. To say: "You have tuberculosis" is not enough. This may mean an advanced or rapidly progressive case or a mild and easily curable one or even an arrested case. Tact, an explanation of the existing condition with the directions necessary to insure as great a degree of comfort and length of life as possible, as hopeful an outlook as can conscientiously be offered will, if sympathetically tendered, lead to a proper mode of living and a minimum of fear. Different patients must be told in different ways. The intelligent man is treated as I have outlined. The more ignorant one who would not understand explanations is ordered, perhaps dogmatically, to do as told. Danger is minimized and fears allayed.

Herrick, James Brian. Papers, Crerar Ms 44, [Box 13, Folder 14], Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

Wasting

[REDACTED] blood [REDACTED] and
[REDACTED] doctors [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] I wear myself out. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] a young
woman who [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] no one is watching. [REDACTED] I crawl,
[REDACTED] I am hollow. There is nothing left,
except [REDACTED] dread. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]⁴

⁴ Kate Bowler, *Everything Happens for a Reason*, 143.

Sex also gives a predisposition to Consumption. Females are more frequently affected by it than males. This may be attributed to their greater delicacy of constitution, and nervous temperament. Their comparatively sedentary habits of life add to this peculiar constitution. But improper compliance with the requisitions of fashion and taste constitutes not a small part of the greater susceptibility of females to Phthisis. Independent of the use of corsets, the small quantity of clothing frequently worn by them, under circumstances when it is most necessary, is a fruitful source of mischief to their health. In the coldest of our winter nights, will these fair devotees of fashion issue from rooms, heated to a degree never experienced in our hottest weather, into the chilling air of midnight, with less clothing than they use at noon, when the sun exerts his greatest power. The next day brings with it "a violent cold," and this cold is too frequently the foundation of the Consumption which destroys them.

Edward Delafield, *An inaugural dissertation on pulmonary consumption*, (New-York: John Forbes & Co., 1816), 15.

Womanhood

I receive [REDACTED] encourage-
ment while I [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] cough flecks of red, red blood onto [REDACTED] white

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] hands. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Dying is exhausting.⁵

⁵ Bowler, *Everything Happens for a Reason*, 115.



Message on back of card reads: "I spent 2 weeks here. Had a fine time. Met lots of lovely people. Run by Dr. Carl. von Rusk." "Asheville, N.C., Winyah Sanitarium." Durwood Barbour Collection of North Carolina Postcards (P077), North Carolina Collection Photographic Archives, Wilson Library, UNC-Chapel Hill.

Waiting

IT IS ALMOST SUMMER, but [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] it is another Wednesday. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] It doesn't get easier. Deep breath. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] live. [REDACTED]⁶

⁶ Kate Bowler, *Everything Happens for a Reason*, 154.

Surrender

[REDACTED] BEARING AWAY MY [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] hours, [REDACTED] I lie [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] waiting for [REDACTED] my time.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I keep thinking [REDACTED] *I am*

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] *enough. It will [REDACTED] be sufficient.* [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] It will [REDACTED] be the life that I [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] had

planned. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I am bargaining. I am trying

to find [REDACTED] magic. [REDACTED]⁷

⁷ Kate Bowler, *Everything Happens for a Reason*, 53.

mistakes. Three hundred individuals branded as sources of contagion, many ostracised, sent to sanitaria, compelled to give up occupation, to forego marriage. All the sacrifices and inconveniences that go with the diagnosis of tuberculosis!

Herrick, James Brian. Papers, Crerar Ms 44, [Box 13, Folder 14], Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.

Ordinary Time

[REDACTED] POURED [REDACTED] OUT [REDACTED] WE

[REDACTED] are stumbling through [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Time, the [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] phase [REDACTED] beginning with

Epiphany [REDACTED] and ending with Ash

[REDACTED] Time picks up again after the

mysteries of [REDACTED] ascension [REDACTED]

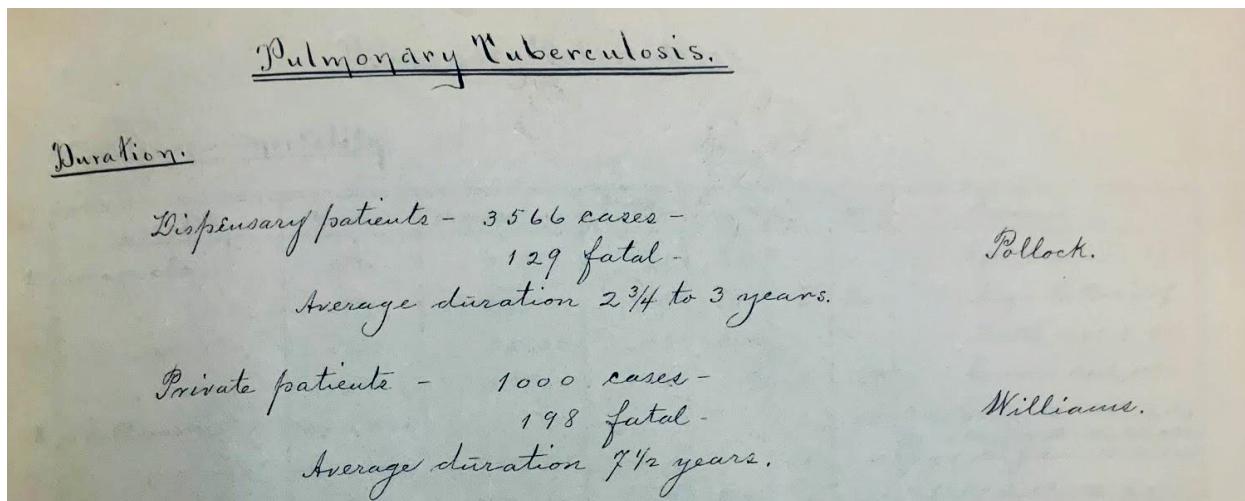
have passed, and stretches out to swallow the [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] space between. It is [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] without [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] cosmic intervention. [REDACTED]⁸

⁸ Kate Bowler, *Everything Happens for a Reason*, (New York: Random House, 2018), 141.



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Wanting

I [redacted] desire [redacted] escape [redacted]

[redacted] an escape from [redacted]

feeling [redacted]

[redacted] relief from the

wounds of the [redacted] past [redacted]

[redacted] salvation from [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted] the things that go bump in the night [redacted]

[redacted] a modicum of power [redacted]⁹

⁹ Kate Bowler, *Everything Happens for a Reason*, (New York: Random House, 2018), xiii.

ISMENE:

You're wrong from the start,
you're off on a hopeless quest.

ANTIGONE:

If you say so, you will make me hate you,
and the hatred of the dead, by all rights,
will haunt you night and day.
But leave me to my own absurdity, leave me
to suffer this—dreadful thing. I will suffer
nothing as great as death without glory.

Exit to the side.

Sophocles, "Antigone" in *The Three Theban Plays*, translated by Robert Fagles, (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 64.

How to get out?

Peel back your thick skin.

Break through the armor of bone.

Follow your heart home.

I was born to join in love, not hate—
that is my nature.

Sophocles, "Antigone" in *The Three Theban Plays*, translated by Robert Fagles, (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 86.

How did the fire start?

You found somebody

something

to love

and your heart began to

burn

with flames far too hot

too wild

for you to contain.

that, so long as the heart contains blood, so long will any of the immediate family who are suffering from consumption continue to grow worse; but, if the heart is burned that the patient will get better. And to make the cure certain the ashes of the heart and liver should be eaten by the person afflicted. In this

Michael Bell, *Food for the Dead: On the Trail of New England Vampires*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2013), 22.

[REDACTED] | **Cheer**

THE LONG DAWN [REDACTED] WILL SOON BEGIN [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] we are all learning to wait. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] for now we

must sit in the darkness.

I come [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] with all sincerity [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

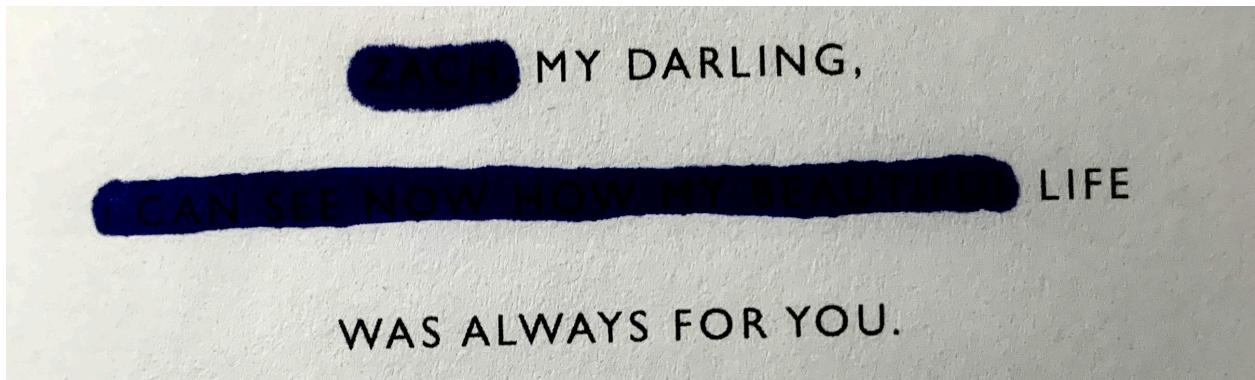
[REDACTED] to sing [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

in the wind. [REDACTED]¹⁰ [REDACTED]

¹⁰ Kate Bowler, *Everything Happens for a Reason*, 88.



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Bibliography

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¹¹ Kate Bowler, *Everything Happens for a Reason*.