

A Word

Death Sentence

This is possibly the world's longest poem to consist of only one sentence. It should have a question mark at the end, but there is no room for it, because the verse comes full circle and simply carries on. It contains 314 words, discounting 3 repeat lines at what would be the end if there were an end.

HAVE you heard how Cuthbert Hatch,
To find a gas leak, struck a match
And thereby hastened his despatch
To realms unknown to you and me,
Who have not yet been foolishly
Inclined to leave posterity
To puzzle for itself just why
We chose to make our fragments fly
For ever upwards to the sky —
As Cuthbert did, when in the dark
He smelled a smell and sparked a spark
Which sent him rising like a lark —
A very shattered fowl, it's true,
With no lump large enough to stew
And nothing any cat could chew —
Into the unresisting space,
Where there is never any place
To rest one's feet or wash one's face —
Though this, for faceless, feetless folk,
As Cuthbert was by then, poor bloke,
Is not by any means a yolk
That is impossible to bear,
For it's with truth that I declare
That cases are extremely rare
Of people ceasing to exist
And then, assuming they'll be missed,
Proceeding promptly to insist
On spreading sadness with their pen
Among their former fellow-men
With news of things beyond their ken
By writing letters to the Press
To say that they are in a mess
Which words in print cannot express,
For they're aware that we below
Quite rarely care just how they go
And, once they've gone, don't want to know
The finer details of the fate
That suddenly transformed their state

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From Man Alive into The Late
Lamented, such as Cuthbert Hatch,
Who found that leak with lighted match
And who thereafter failed to catch
The interest of the public eye
Or move mankind to spare a sigh —
Which may explain precisely why
I think that Cuthbert Hatch (the late)
Would not expect to read (or rate)
A second sentence on the fate
Of a lad who'd no desire
To go off bang and so inspire
A story-teller to enquire:

*Have you heard how Cuthbert Hatch,
To find a gas leak, struck a match
And thereby hastened his dispatch. . .*
