

Dear Bereaved,

I'm sorry to hear you lost your father, and so rapidly. But I'm glad you were able to say the important things to him before he left. It doesn't sound as though you need much help with grieving but I want to tell you that the best living writer I know right now for death is Ali Smith and the best dead one is Sam Beckett. The dead people in *Artful* and *How to be both* just kind of hang around as though they're part of life – the living and the dead talk with one another. And then there's Beckett who as you know also has the dead about. In a letter he wrote to bereaved Barbara Bray in 1958 he said that he can't talk of solace (or as we might say today, 'I don't do solace'): 'I can see nothing for us but the old earth turning onward and time feasting on our suffering along with the rest.'

Some say I'm inconsolable but I think in some strange way there's solace for me in that thought of the old earth turning. It's the art, isn't it, the turning of the phrase, that brings the solace? Like cellophane on the wrap-up flowers at modern places of death, cliché hangs around bereavement. I'm afraid I have to tell you that when death came out of the blue for the one I loved the most I lost all patience with cliché. I picked up instead a bitterness for those more fortunate and, as I realise from my reaction to your letter, for those who have good deaths surrounded by the people they love. Sorry. Tiptoeing around the bereaved isn't quite my style any more. Now it's 'I don't believe you. Tell me where it hurts.'

But still, with many condolences to you and your family,
Myna ¹

In a letter he wrote
in 1958 he said that
(or as we might say)
'I can see nothing
turning onward
suffering along with

¹ Myna Trustram's book *Women of the Regiment: The Victorian Army at Home* was published by Cambridge University Press in 1984. Since then she has worked in museums and galleries, returning recently to university life as a researcher

at Manchester School of Art. She writes academic articles but also works in other written forms that move around essay, memoir and performance. Her work is about loss, melancholy and the abundance of museum collections.