

Ennis Rees

IN MORGAN'S HALL

The old poet talked with the agnostic at a dinner
in honor of Walt Whitman's seventy-first birthday.

--Philadelphia Press, June 1, 1890

Bob Ingersoll, having eloquently orated
On the poet's book, argues across the table
Against the immortality of the soul.

Walt Whitman, intestines, liver, and lungs
Riddled with tuberculosis, all but an eighth
Of the right lung useless, with arteriosclerosis

Of the brain, and abscesses under the sternum,
Fifth rib, and in the left foot, his kidneys weak,
With a cyst on a suprarenal gland, his prostate

Enlarged, and one incredible stone in his bladder,
Quietly affirms his lifelong belief
In the certain immortality of the soul.

He speaks of the sunset breeze coming into his window,
Lovely and soothing. And to die, he says, is different
From what anyone supposes, and luckier.