

## The End of an Era · *James Tate*

When your address book starts to fall apart  
you know it's the end of an era.  
When the dead or lost determine your days  
then it should be decided that this is  
the end of an era. Buy yourself some new shirts,  
it can't hurt. Let a perfect stranger  
cut your hair, what do you care? The newspapers

can't think up any new headlines. Call it  
the end of an era just to get something going,  
to get people thinking, to at least consider  
abandoning the plan. Suddenly it *feels*  
like the end of an era, like something you don't  
have to say goodbye to, it's just gone.  
It's not like a pet getting run-over, that's

a specific pain and it will fall into place—  
the street, the traffic, the odds. When  
an era ends, nobody decides anything,  
a terrible ooze accumulates, and a private, unspoken  
nausea takes over. We awake to how wrong  
everything has become, our best dishes  
mean nothing, and, still alone, we cry:

“I want to break out of the Grief Motel!  
I want to kick out the windows of the Grief Motel!”

Life is a muscular, tear-wrenching thing  
at the end of an era.