

# [Sharpio’s auto wreck: the theme of death](https://assignbuster.com/sharpios-auto-wreck-the-theme-of-death/)

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Sharpio's " Auto Wreck": The Theme of DeathFew subjects can be discussed with more insightfulness and curiosity
than death. The unpredictability and grimness of it are conveyed well in Karl
Shapiro's poem, " Auto Wreck". The poem starts with a description of an
ambulance rushing to the scene of a crash, and hurriedly gathering up the
victims and rushing them away. The aftermath of the police investigation that
follows leaves the crowd gathered around the scene to explore privately and
individually a range of feelings and emotions about the reality of death.

Shapiro's usage of imagery together with figurative language is a key element in
getting the theme of death across to the reader. By bringing the scene of the
accident to life and relaying the emotions of the spectators with language and
several metaphors, the poem gains a realistic and sometimes transcendent effect.

In some places in the poem, the words can easily be taken literally to convey
scenery or an emotion, but they can also be taken so as to make the reader think
about possible higher meanings. The thoughtsexpressed in the poem help to
suggest these other meanings by clearly stating what is being felt by the
speaker and the crowd around the accident. By stating clearly and vividly the
emotions of the scene, it is easy for the reader to identify the theme itself,
and also to identify with it.

In the first stanza, the speaker describes the ambulance arriving on the
scene more so than the actual scene itself. The ambulance is described using
words such as " wings", " dips", and " floating", giving the impression of the
hectic nature of its business at an accident. When the ambulance arrives and
breaks through the crowd, " the doors leap open" to further convey the hurried
state it's in. In line 5, as the ambulance passes the beacons and illuminated
clocks, it gives the reader an obvious clue about setting. To take the words'
meaning further, it can be argued that the illumination of the clocks and the
emptying light in line 8 symbolize life itself as light in an otherwise dark
situation. Also, the allusion to a heart by use of the words " pulsing",
" artery" and " beating" personify the ambulance as the new life giving support of
the victims of the crash. The doors in line 14 being an " afterthought" and
being closed makes the impression that death did actually occur at the scene,
which is grimly described in the second stanza. The words themselves continue to
give clues about the theme in line 11 which reads, " Then the bell, breaking the
hush, tolls once." I saw this line as an allusion to an old expression taken
from poetry for the unpredictablilty of death, " for whom the bell tolls". The
expression emphasizes the fact that no one knows who will be next in line for
fate to meet them in a grim way, and this allusion gives the last two stanzas
more effectiveness when the feelings are expressed by the speaker.

In the second stanza, the actual words are not the main reflection of
the theme of the poem as much as the imagery itself. The reader gets the clue
that the speaker is actually at the scene reacting to it simply by the word " We"
in the first line. When the scene is described there is mention of " pools of
blood" and glass being swept away by seemingly unfeeling policemen, described in
line 16 as " large and composed". The speaker feels deranged walking among these
cops and actually feeling the gravity of the situation, while the police go on
about their business not expressing any remorse. They make notes and hang
lanterns and just do their job. Again, the " pools of blood" is the best example
of imagery reflecting theme by explaining the grimness present at an auto wreck.

The reaction to the wreck and imagery created in this stanza present a good
basis for the feelings expressed in the last stanza.

The reader can identify with the theme of the poem in the last stanza
with the imagery and figurative language both expressing it very clearly. In
lines 22 through 27, the speaker speaks on behalf of the crowd in expressing the
feeling after witnessing death. Through simile (" our throats were tight as
tourniquets") and metaphor (" our feet were bound with splints") the feeling of
shock and timidness to think about the reality of what the wreck really
symbolizes is present. The feeling of timidness turns to a need to express
feelings somehow by the witnesses, so they " speak through sickly smiles" and
make " grim jokes". Through this interaction, though, the feeling that death can
happen anywhere at any time starts to set with the crowd, and also with the
reader at this point. The speaker starts reflecting on the accident from line
31 through the rest of the poem, talking about the questions " Who shall die?"
and " Who is innocent?". The randomness of death is further presented in lines
33 and 34, which basically mean that in this crash as opposed to war where death
is imminent, and suicide where death has a reason and logic(both examples in the
poem), the fatality was not necessary and not preventable either. Lines 35
through 39 also reflect theme by finally stating that death " invites the occult
mind" and " cancels our physics with a sneer". Taking the meaning from these
parts and the last lines of the poem takes the speaker and reader through the
realization that death is unpredictable and thought provoking, knowing that it
can happen in the worst way at any given time.

" Auto Wreck" deals with the complex subject of death by exposing the
reader to the feelings of the speaker after witnessing a crash. The theme that
death is unpredictable and grim is presented through these feelings. The
stanzas are set up such that the steps from shock to realization of what death
contains can be presented in order of occurence. The first stanza describes
the ambulance coming to try to save the victims, and the second stanza deals
with the immediate aftermath of the crash. These first two stanzas really
create a background to the final stanza, which takes the reader through a range
of emotions along with the speaker. The last stanza entirely is the perfect
example of how the imagery and figurative language get these emotions across to
the reader. In doing such, the theme is revealed very clearly and the reader
can think to himself for whom the bell really tolls.

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